

THE  
Mystery of Atheism;  
OR THE  
D E V I C E S

Made use of  
To Countenance and Propagate it:  
Together with the  
EVIL and DANGER of them;  
Set forth in several Letters to a  
Friend.

Wherein is made appear, that 'tis not want of E-  
vidence, but Sincerity that makes Men Atheists.

---

By the Author of the *Mystery of Phantasmia*.

---

Psal. 14. 1. *The Fool hath said, in his heart  
there is no God.*

---

L O N D O N:

Printed for A. and J. Churchill, at the Black Swan in  
Peter-Nefter-Row. And sold by Rich. Gurney  
in Bristol. 1699.

THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

# STATUTES

OF THE [illegible] IN THE [illegible]

OF THE [illegible] AND [illegible]

IN THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

AND [illegible] OF THE [illegible]

IN THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

AND [illegible] OF THE [illegible]

IN THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

AND [illegible] OF THE [illegible]

IN THE [illegible] OF [illegible]

---

## The P R E F A C E.

**I**F any be desirous to know the occasion of these Letters, he need only look abroad, and may soon see that there is but too much occasion for them: For Atheism is so strangely encreas'd among us of late Years, and grown to that height, that like a torrent it overflows the Banks and Boundaries of Laws, and hath almost carried away all Religion before it: So that 'tis high time to use our best Endeavours to stem this Tide, and if possible to put a stop to this overflowing of Ungodliness.

It hath been a matter hotly disputed in former times, whether there ever was, or could be such an Anomalous Creature as an Atheist; or if any Age had here and there afforded one, he was reputed a Monster or Prodigy, and gaz'd upon as a Wonderful Rarity: But our Age hath put this matter out of Question, and perhaps afforded more than any that hath gone before it; this Monster is now grown familiar, and may every day and almost every where be seen. Atheism in old times was so modest, as not to venture abroad without a Mask or Disguise; but 'tis now become bare-faced, and hath

## The P R E F A C E.

cast off all blushing and shame; and whereas the fool in David's days only said in his heart, in ours he speaks out, and says with his Tongue, there is no God.

'Twill be needless to recount here the extream Folly and Danger of Atheism, which the Reader will find in some measure done in the following Letters: If there be a God that made and governs the World, (as there is all the Reason in the World from the Make and Management of it to believe there is) what a vile affront must it be to Question his Being, and to go about to argue him out of the World, that made and plac'd as in it? This must tear up all Religion by the Root, subvert the Foundation of human Society, and destroy all that Trust and Confidence we ought to have in him and one another: Yea, the Atheist is the most gross and silly of all Impostors, for he puts a cheat upon himself, and not only excludes him from all the Comfort and Happiness he might hope from so lovely a Being, but exposes himself to all that Misery and Punishment, that may be feared from an incensed Deity.

And yet as silly as this is, he is not only willing to be thus grossly deceiv'd himself, but is very busie to draw in and deceive others, and to make Proselytes to such a senseless and fatal imposture; by which means the infection of this Evil spreads dayly, and the distemper is well-nigh become Epidemical.

Now

## The PREFACE.

Now this Mystery of Iniquity working so strongly in our days, and this Spiritual wickedness being again seated in high places, 'twill be requisite (if it may be) both to detect and dethrone it. 'Tis indeed a matter Worthy the inquiry of the best and wisest Men, to search into the bottom of this Evil, that by knowing the Cause, they may the better apply timely Remedies for the Cure of it, before the distemper grow inveterate and incurable; for tho' all sin in general, yet an Atheistical Contempt of God, and boldness in sinning, do more particularly undermine the Peace and Prosperity of a Nation, and more than ordinarily hasten and ripen it for destruction.

Now tho' there may be some latent Causes of Atheism, that lye more hidden and out of sight, yet there are others that are more visible, and apparently lead to this great Evil: The loosning the Principles of Religion and Government hath certainly a great hand in it; the dissolving the Tyes of Justice and Honesty does not a little contribute towards it, and the breaking the Bonds of Unity and Peace have an easie and natural tendency to it: how much the immodesty and immorality of the Stage hath tended this way, hath been lately shew'd by an excellent Pen; what mischief hath proceeded from that other Stage, I mean the Conventicle, sad experience may inform us; and how much Religion hath suffered by a new Set of Reformers, who are for Reforming

## THE PREFACE.

*Reforming all faults but their own, may be dayly seen; and this, as all other Mysteries, hath some depths and intrigues, which must be searcht into and laid open, before the evil can be prevented.*

*'Twas foretold that in the latter days, some should put on a Form of Godliness, without the Power of it; and likewise that there should arise Scoffers, walking after their own Lusts: Both these Prophecies we may see accomplish'd in our days, in which we find some acting very vile things under a Cloak of Religion; and others throwing off all pretensions to it, breaking thir jests upon God and Religion, and making the most Sacred and Serious things the Object of their Contempt and Raillery: And both these, tho' steering different courses, fall at last into the Gulph of Atheism, in which many are swallowed up, and from whence few return.*

*In a Word, Atheism is the Completion of Vice and Wickedness; in which they all center and terminate; so that this sin when it is finished bringeth forth death, and sinks Men into everlasting perdition. This then being an Evil so pernicious to the welfare of Mankind, as well as to the Honour of our Maker, 'twill be necessary to set forth the Arts by which it is disguised and propagated, that we may behold this Monster in its own shape, and be thereby induced to shun and detest it.* Farewel.

---

# The CONTENTS.

## Letter 1.

**O**F the Atheists casting off the awe and sense of a Deity, the better to enjoy and indulge his Lusts. page 1

## Letter 2.

Of his solving the Phenomena of the World without a Deity. p. 11

## Letter 3.

Of his endeavouring to stifle the Convictions and Notices that Conscience gives of a Deity. p. 24

## Letter 4.

Of his ascribing the Notion of a God to easiness of Belief and fond Credulity. p. 34

## Letter 5.

Of his resolving it into the Principles and Prejudices of Education. p. 42

## Letter 6.

Of his attributing to Fear or a Superstitious Dread of some invisible Powers. p. 50

## Letter 7.

His ascribing it to State-Policy. p. 58

## Letter 8.

Ascribing it to Common Compact. p. 64

## Letter 9.

His denial of the Notion and Being of a Spirit. p. 70

Letter

# THE CONTENTS.

Letter 10.

*Of the unequal Distribution of Earthly things.*  
p. 78

Letter 11.

*Of his taking advantage from the Disputes  
and Differences in Religion.*  
p. 86

Letter 12.

*His making use of the Hypocrisie of Pretenders  
to cast off all Religion.*  
p. 93

Letter 13.

*Of Scoffing at Religion.*  
p. 99

Letter 14.

*His charging Religion with a Foolish Bargain.*  
p. 106

Letter 15.

*The Close, containing some Directions for the  
Cure of Atheism.*  
p. 113

---

LET

( 1 )

---

# LETTER I.

SIR;

I Received yours, wherein I find you passionately bewailing the growth of Atheism; and very desirous to know something of the Causes and Cure of it.

I am sufficiently sensible of the Justice of the Complaint, and because this Evil hath so malign an influence, not only on the private but publick Welfare, cannot but commend the Charity of your Request, and therefore shall endeavour something towards your Satisfaction.

And here the First and Grand Device of the Atheist, that occurs to our view, is, The casting off the awe and dread of a Deity, the more securely to enjoy and indulge his Lusts: This is indeed the great depth of this Mystery of Iniquity, which must therefore be a little searcht into and unravell'd; that

( 2 )  
that we may the better see the malignity of it.

It is most certain, that the Looseness and Debauchery of mens lives is the prime fundamental Cause of all Atheism; for Sin and Wickedness make a Party against Religion, whose Chief design it is to check and controul them; and where Religion is not strong enough to subdue mens Lusts, there mens Lusts will be strong enough to subdue their Religion; these are contrary one to the other, and as the one gets ground, the other loses it: When Vice and Wickedness have taken possession of the heart, and prevail'd over the Affections, they soon draw the Mind over to their Party, and engage it against all Religion, Corrupt Practices, naturally lead to Corrupt Principles; and the debauchery of Manners, of course, brings on the debauchery of the Mind. That there are strong Propensities and Inclinations in mens Natures, to wickedness and vice, is a thing too sensibly felt to need any proof; and that these may, and frequently do, wear off and obliterate the Natural Impressions of Good and Evil, the Course of mens lives too sadly verifies; and, what a natural tendency

dency this hath to Atheism, half an eye  
 may discover. For, whilst men retain any  
 love to Virtue, and keep the mastery  
 over their Lusts and vile Affecti-  
 ons, so long they retain their Religi-  
 on, and keep up a due sense and ve-  
 neration of the Divine Majesty! but  
 when they strike off from the love and  
 practice of Virtue, and let loose the  
 reins to their vitious Inclinations,  
 they naturally run into Irreligion and  
 Atheism; for Virtue and Goodness being  
 the only Curb to restrain this Extrava-  
 gance, when that is gone, they have  
 nothing left to stop them in the Career,  
 and so are hurried on headlong into the  
 gulph of Atheism. If you observe it,  
 Good men are never dispos'd to Atheism;  
 'Tis the grief and abhorrence, but never  
 the Choice of such Persons: 'Tis only  
 the profligate and prophane, who have  
 sinn'd away the sense of a Deity, that  
 fly to it for shelter: and to give their  
 lusts the freer scope, make their last  
 resort to it. Yea, these too must in  
 a great measure un-man themselves,  
 before they can so far degenerate; and  
 in a manner turn Beasts, before they  
 can turn Atheists.

But what influence hath the loose-

ness and debauchery of mens lives upon the producing of Atheism? Why, Great every way. As,

First, Mens wicked lives make it their Interest that there should be no God; and this gives a Bias to the mind that strongly draws it into Atheism. All sin and wickedness being repugnant to the Purity and Perfection of a Supreme Being, and contrary to the express Declarations of his Will, must necessarily incur his displeasure: And tho' Infinite Goodness may warn Sinners of the danger, yet Infinite Justice cannot suffer the wilful Violations of his Authority and Laws to go unpunish'd. Now, resolute and obstinate Sinners being conscious how they have affronted such a Being, and thereby rendered themselves obnoxious to his just Indignation and Vengeance, have all the reason in the world to dread him; and, they can, to fly from him; from whom they can have no other than fearful Expectations of Wrath, and the Revelation of Righteous Judgment: And having thus made him their Enemy 'tis plainly become their Interest that there should be no such Being. Now Interest (you know) hath a mighty

fluor

fluor  
they  
so th  
whic  
see,  
from  
hope  
whe  
brou  
only  
thing  
on fi  
have  
of th  
Agai  
24  
it th  
God,  
wish  
anot  
ty,  
For,  
need  
it ca  
with  
The  
the P  
on m  
to en  
ing r

fluence on mens Inclinations ; and as they easily believe what makes for them, so they are hardly perswaded to that which makes against them : Hence we see, that Good men easily believe a God, from whom they have well-grounded hopes of Happiness and a future Reward : whereas wicked men are very hardly brought to it, because they have reason only to fear him, and can look for nothing but eternal misery and destruction from him : And if at any time they have any Faith in him, 'tis but like that of the Devils, to believe and tremble. Again,

2<sup>dly</sup>, Mens wicked lives having made it their Interest that there should be no God, their next step is to make it their wish that there were none. This is another piece of this Mystery of Iniquity, and a farther advance to Atheism : For, the belief of an Incens'd Deity, must needs sit very uneasie upon the mind ; it cannot but fret and gall, and fill it with continual horror and perplexity : The Sense of this serves to imbitter the Pleasures of Sin, to put a check upon mens Vices, and will not suffer them to enjoy their Lusts in quiet ; which being resolv'd to do, they grow impatient

under this Check: And this makes them desirous to rid themselves of the awe and sense of such an uneasy Being. The good man finds that ease and satisfaction in the sense of a Deity, that he wou'd not for any thing be without it, for it fills him with joy and content now, and gives him Peace and Happiness at the last: Inſomuch, that were he to wish himself the Chiefeſt Good, it would be in the comfort and complacence he feels in the belief of a Deity. Whereas the loose and wicked person, is haunted with perpetual Fears and Terrors; and the diſquietude he feels, from the apprehenſions of a God, drives him to wish there were no ſuch Being to obſerve and puniſh him; and then a ſmall matter will perſwade him to it; for, *Facile credimas, quod volumus*, we eaſily believe what we long and deſire ſhould be true.

3dly, And this leads to the third and laſt ſtep to Atheiſm, which is, from wiſhing there were no God, to endeavouring to perſwade themſelves that there is none; there being an eaſie and natural tranſition, from the one to the other: for the Will and Affections have a great ſway on the Underſtanding; and when

when Interest hath engag'd the former, they soon draw the latter to their side; so that what men make their Wish, quickly becomes their Choice; and from a desire to discard the Deity, easily come to deny and disbelieve him.

But by what Means do they endeavour and effect this? Why,

1. First, They muster up all their Reason and Wit to argue against the Being of a God, and seek to dispute him out of the world. To this end, they labour, as well as they can, to weaken the force of all those Arguments that are brought for the proof of a Deity, and make the best shift they can, either to answer or evade them. Again, they magnifie the strength of those Arguments that are brought against such a Being: And, (tho' to prove a Negative, in this as in many other cases, be both irrational and impossible, yet) to shew their goodwill to their Maker, the slenderest Cavils or Probabilities of this nature shall have a mighty force with them; and the slightest Sophistry be advanc'd into Demonstration. But if this will not do, they endeavour,

2. To banish all thoughts of God out of their mind, and to cast off the re-

membrance of him : Because they cannot sin quietly for him, they resolve not to think of him, and therefore put those thoughts far from them that give them this disturbance. This was the Atheists course in *David's* time, who tells us, [*That God was not in all their thoughts ;*] yea, that his thoughts were always grievous to them ; and therefore they removed them far out of their sight, that they might have no fear of him before their Eyes : And the thoughts of a God that observes and records our Actions, and will one day reckon for them, are still irksom and grievous to impenitent sinners ; which makes them use their Art to get rid of them. Indeed, could they but reconcile the belief of a Deity, with the enjoyment of their lusts, the thoughts of him would be easie enough to them ; and this temptation to Atheism in a great measure cease. Could they serve the true God, as the Heathens did the false ones, with riot and uncleanness, none would be greater Votaries than they : But since the sense of him strikes such a damp upon their Pleasures, and puts such a curb and restraint upon their Vices, they cannot away with the thoughts of him, and therefore

therefore labour to rid their minds of the belief, that they may be rid of the fear of such a Being. But, is this a wise or safe course? No, extremely foolish and dangerous: for, tho' it be weakness to fear where no fear is, yet not to fear where there is a just cause and a proper Object for it, is the height of Folly: And, to shut our Eyes against a certain Danger, for fear of being frightened by it, is no better than madness. Indeed, could we put out the Sun by winking, or avoid the danger of Divine Vengeance, by shaking off the dread of it, there might be some shew of Reason for our Unbelief; but, since the truth of things depends not upon our belief or disbelief of them; and the very Notion of a Deity implies a necessity of Existence, it must be monstrously senseless and unreasonable, to cast off the awe and dread of him.

Again, To regulate our Faith by interest and affection, is to walk by a false and crooked Rule: For, these being frequently corrupted, clap a wrong Bias upon the Mind, which too often turns it from the Truth, and turns it unto Fables: And consequently, to steer our course by these measures, is to follow a  
false

false Guide, which must lead us out of our way. Indeed, would men rightly understand and follow their true Interest, it would then lead them aright into the paths of Religion, there being no comfort or security at all to be had without it: But, when they weakly mistake their Interest, and vainly wish there were no Superior Being to obstruct it, they do but court misery, and fondly chuse their own destruction.

In short, the vast risque that these men run, plainly shews it to be extremely unsafe and dangerous: For, if the Atheist find at last that there is a God, whom he hath all his life-time deny'd and despis'd, what unspeakable Horror must seize his guilty Soul, which must groan for ever under the wrath of such an Almighty Being, and be eternally miserable without ease or remedy? The Good-man runs no risque at all, for the sense of such a Being hath made him more healthful and easie to himself, more useful and serviceable to others, and more honoured and respected of all men for both: And if there be no God at last, he can find no inconvenience in this belief; but if there be one,

( 11 )

one, he hath infinitely the better on't; being sure to be Eternally Happy in his favour and presence.

So that if this were but a doubtful Case, common prudence teaches men to chuse the safest side; to which therefore 'twill be our Wisdom to incline. I am,

S I R,

October 16.  
1698.

Your hearty Friend,

A. B.

---

## LETTER II.

S I R,

**I** Find you sensible, in your last, of the great evil and danger of that Artifice which hath drawn so many into Atheism, (*viz.*) The casting off the awe and sense of a Deity, that they may go on the more securely in their Sins. I proceed in this to another Device made use of to the same purpose, (and

(and that is) some Mens endeavouring to solve the *Phænomena* of the Universe, and to give an account of the Existence of the World without a Supreme Being.

'Tis well known, that one of the Principal Arguments and Demonstrations of a Deity, is taken from the Works both of Creation and Providence; [*The Invisible things of God from the Creation of the World, being clearly seen, even his Eternal Power and Godhead.*] And 'tis evident, (as the same Apostle told the Men of Lystra) [*That God hath not left himself without witness, in that he doth good, and giveth rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*] Indeed, the admirable frame and order of the World, together with the wonderful Provision made for all the Creatures in it, plainly bespeak an Almighty Agent, to be both the Contriver and Preserver of it: Yea, there are those visible marks of an Infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness, stamp'd upon every Creature, that manifestly shew the Finger of a God; and direct our Minds to the Knowledge and Contemplation of him.

Now

Now to evade this clear and palpable Proof of his Being, the Atheist racks his Brain to find out a way of accounting for these things, without a first Cause or Orderer of them. And of these there are two sorts, *viz.*

The first, Of those that assert the Eternity of the World.

The other, Of such as make it the Product of Chance and Fortune. The Former, are the followers of *Aristotle*, and the Latter of *Epicurus*. Both which shew their great unwillingness to believe a Deity; and how desirous they are *to live without God in the World*. But let us Examine the Account they give us of these Matters. To which end, let us begin with the first sort.

1<sup>st</sup>. Who, to set aside a First Cause, affirm the World to have had no beginning, but to have been from Eternity, as it now is; there having been an Eternal Succession of Men and all other Creatures, as we now find it.

Now, what proof is offer'd for this bold Affirmation? Why, none at all, 'tis a precarious Assertion, taken up from the single Opinion of *Aristotle*, without any offer of Proof, or colour of Reason; and only shews that some Men

Men have a mind to have it so; and would fain persuade themselves and others to it, if they can. And yet this Opinion, as deliver'd by *Aristotle*, serves not the Atheist's turn neither: For, tho' he affirmed the World to have no Beginning, yet he said not 'twas of its self; but that it proceeded from God, by the way of a Natural and necessary Effect, as light does from the Sun. Where there is a plain Confession of a God, from whom the World and all things in it sprang by a Natural and Eternal Emanation. So that he did not, with the Modern Atheists, set up the Notion of the Eternity of the World, to exclude a First Cause; but thought it to be consistent with it.

But is there any Proof that the World had a Beginning, and that there is a First Cause and Maker of it? Yes, as great as the Nature of the thing is capable of; which being a matter of Fact of an ancient Date, can only be prov'd by Testimony, and the fair appearances of Reason: And if both these concur in the matter before us, 'tis as much as the thing will bear; and

and consequently, as much as any wise man will require.

1<sup>st</sup>. And First, that the World was made and had a Beginning, we have the Testimony of all Mankind from the first making of it; there being an Universal Tradition hereof, deliver'd down thro' every Age since its Beginning. The *Egyptians*, and *Phœnicians* of old; the *Grecians*, *Assyrians*, *Persians*, and *Romans*, of latter Date, all had, and handed down this Tradition. Yea, the *Indians* and all other the most rude and barbarous Nations, that had little or no Commerce with other Nations, concurr'd in this Belief; all of them worshipping a God, whom they own'd to be the Maker and Governour of the World. And tho' some difference hath been found about the Computation of Time, and the Age of the World, yet all agree in this, that it was made. Yea, we find *Aristotle* himself, who was the first Asserter of the Eternity of the World, (in his Book *De Mundo*, Chap. 6<sup>th</sup>) freely confessing, that 'twas a general Tradition among all Men, that all things are of God, and were made by him.

2<sup>dly</sup>. Again

2dly. Again, *Secondly*, we find this Universal Tradition confirmed by the written Histories of all Times and Places ever since. If we allow *Moses* the Credit of the first and ancientest Historian (which cannot be in Reason denied him) we have a full and consistent Relation of the Beginning of the World and all things in it, which hath been receiv'd, and recorded from him in all succeeding Ages; and is most agreeable with the Account which all other Ancient Writers, whether Poets or Philosophers, give of this matter, being in all probability derived from him: Insomuch, that we find *Aristotle* himself (in his Book *De Cælo*, lib. 1. cap. 10.) once more acknowledging, that all the Philosophers that were before him, did hold that the World was made.

3dly. Moreover, *Thirdly*, we can trace up the Original of all Arts and Sciences, in the several Times and Places, when, and where they were first Invented: Which, if the World were Eternal, would have been found out long before, and been known far beyond all Memory: Unless we can suppose, that all Men in the Ages before

for  
Et  
all  
M  
wi  
Lu  
the  
con  
ent  
the  
of  
A  
beg  
coun  
in t  
the  
all t  
foun  
time  
4.  
dry  
to be  
and  
ty, t  
utter  
long  
is co  
Mate  
would  
funde

fore we have any Account, passed an Eternity in a deep Sleep; and were all so dull, as either to do nothing Memorable, or to be unable or unwilling to Record it. And therefore *Lucretius* wisely asks the Question, If the World had no Beginning, how comes it to pass, that the most Ancient Poets mention nothing higher than the *Theban* War, and the Destruction of *Troy*?

And indeed, if the World had no beginning, it is strange that no account should be given of any thing in that Eternity of Duration, before the World is said to begin: And that all things that are known, should be found out and Recorded since that time.

4. Besides *Fourthly*, We see the sundry parts of which the World consists, to be subject to decay and Corruption; and had they been so from all Eternity, they must in all probability have utterly perish'd and come to nothing long since. The Frame of the World, is compos'd of such frail Corruptible Materials, that, in an infinite space, would necessarily dissolve, and fall asunder, without a Superiour Power to uphold

uphold and keep the parts together. This we may see excellently urg'd by *Lucretius* (Lib. 5.) where he tells us, "That the World must necessarily be  
 "acknowledg'd to have had a beginning, otherwise, those things which  
 "are in their own Nature corruptible,  
 "could never, from all Eternity, have  
 "held out against all the forcible and violent Assaults and Accidents, which  
 "in an infinite duration must have  
 "happen'd to them. And therefore we find, that *Aristotle* having affirm'd the World to have had no beginning, was thereby driven in his own defence, to affirm, it can have no end; for whatsoever hath an end, must have a beginning: And if the Frame of the World be Subject to Dissolution, it could not possibly have been from Eternity. In short, we plainly see, that all things are some way or other produc'd; every man is of another; and every other thing hath some Cause of his Being, which must necessarily lead up to a first Cause, which is of its self, and made and preserves all other: And if the World had no beginning, we may safely conclude, it must long since have had an end. So that  
 this

this First *Hypothesis* of the Eternity of the World, taken up without any proof, upon the single Authority of *Aristotle*, against the Universal Belief and Tradition of Mankind, is, both unreasonable and unaccountable. ✓

2. Let us proceed then, *Secondly*, to that of *Epicurus*, and see whether that be any better. And here, to exclude a Deity or first Cause, we find him affirming, that the World was made by Chance, and all things in it came together of themselves, by some lucky Hits and Accidents: An account whereof is briefly this, (*viz.*) " They tell us, that the Matter of which the World was fram'd, was from Eternity; and likewise, an Infinite empty space, for the innumerable small Particles (call'd Atomes) to move and play in: And that these being in continual motion, did after infinite Tryals and Rencounters, without the help or direction of a Supreme Being, by lucky Hits and Chances, settle at last in that goodly Frame and Order of things, which we now see, and find the World to be in.

A goodly account indeed! Which serves only to shew, that some men

are willing to believe any thing rather than a God. For, who ever heard of a House that was made without Hands? Or a Book compos'd by an accidental jumbling and meeting together of Letters and Syllables of their own accord? And yet, This is far more easie to be imagin'd, than for so Stately and Beautiful a Structure as this of the World, to be rais'd without an Artificer: Or the great Volume of the Universe, to be compil'd without an Author. But, what Foundation hath this vain and incredible *Hypothesis*? Why, none but the bold confidence of *Epecurus* and his Followers, grounded upon a desire of letting loose the Reins to his Appetite, and enjoying sensual Pleasures without controul. Indeed, there can be no possible evidence of the World's being thus made by chance: For, these Atomes of which he speaks are altogether invisible; and, for ought we know, move only in the empty space of an *Epicurean* Brain. Yea, there is all imaginable Evidence to the contrary: For, there are those apparent Marks of Infinite

Infinite Power and Wisdom in the Frame of the World, that render it altogether impossible to be the effect of Chance: for, since none could ever speak of a Structure, where all the parts of it came together of themselves; and we never read of any thing Great and Noble, that was ever effected or came to pass that way; how senseless is it to conceive, that this glorious and regular Fabrick of the World, which affords us many Wonders as Parts, should be the work of any other than a Divine Hand.

So that the Folly of this Deyce, of giving an account of the Being and continuance of the World, without a Deity, is very apparent; for it contradicts the Reason and Sense of Mankind in all Ages; and opposes a Truth, that hath swim'd down the Current of time without interruption. Neither is the Evil and Danger less visible, than the Folly of it; For, this is the highest Affront and Indignity that can be offered to our Maker, to rob him of the Honour of his Works, and to deny him the Glory that should accrue from them. There is certainly

a Tribute of Honour and acknowledgment due to the Sovereign Lord and Maker of the Universe ; which is to be paid by all his Creatures, but especially by Man, who is made the visible Lord and Vice-Roy of this lower World: Now, to call in question his making or right of governing the World, is to deny him this Homage ; and consequently to prove Rebellious to our Supreme Lord and Master ; which must needs be a matter of extreme and inconceivable danger.

Again, *2dly.* 'Tis a high piece of Ingratitude to disown our Maker and chiefest Benefactor, from whom we receive Life and Breath and all things ; and to whom we owe therefore our loudest Praises and Thanksgivings : And when all other Creatures in, their way, shew forth the Glory of God, what Unworthiness is it in Man, who was chiefly design'd for that end, to with-hold it from him : This is, not only negligently to observe the Works of the Lord, but utterly to disclaim and forget the Operations of his Hand : Which must needs sink him who was made somewhat higher

higher than the Angels, into a Condition lower and worse than the Beast that perisheth.

3dly. Yea (*Thirdly*) This is not only a high piece of injustice and ingratitude to our Maker, but a great injury to Mankind; who are hereby depriv'd of that Assistance and Affiance, they might have in a Supreme Being; and consequently of that comfort and benefit they might receive from him. We dayly see what impotent and feeble Creatures, even the best of Men are; liable to a thousand miseries and misfortunes, which they can neither prevent nor remove: Now the only comfort or relief we can have against These; is, in the Apprehensions of a God, who is of infinite Power and Goodness; and consequently, both able and willing to help us: There we may safely repose our Trust and Confidence, with well-grounded hopes of a supply of all our wants, and a happy issue out of all our afflictions: Now, by calling in Question the Truth of such a Being, who is the Author and disposer of such Events, Men bereave themselves of all these comfortable expectations, and make them-

selves miserable by their own Infidelity. So that this Device of the Atheist, is as imprudent as 'tis unreasonable; for it deprives him of all that comfort, which he might have in this Life; and excludes him from all that happiness, to which he was design'd in the next.

These are obvious Truths, on which I shall not need to enlarge; and shall therefore leave them to your farther Meditation. I am,

S I R,

Your true Friend,

A. B

## LETTER III.

S I R,

**I**N your last I find you readily own the works of Creation and Providence to be palpable Demonstrations of a Deity, and wonder at the Atheists blindness

ness or boldness in so easily overlooking or gainsaying them.

I proceed in this to another Device to the same purpose, and that is the silencing the Voice of Conscience, and stifling the frequent Notices and Alarms it gives of a Supreme Being: Among the other witnesses that God hath left us of himself, that of Conscience is none of the least, which for the clear and uncontrollable Evidence of its Testimony, hath been reckon'd more than a thousand witnesses. That we might not be left without sufficient Light in a matter of so great moment, God Almighty hath not only Engraven his own Image and Superscription upon the Works of his Hand, that by the frequent viewing thereof, we might be still minded of him; but hath likewise set up a constant Monitor in every Man's Breast, that by hearkening to it we might never forget him: This is that which is stil'd the Light of Nature, and by some the Light within them, which, if rightly understood, must be meant of this Directive Light of their own Mind or Conscience: *Sola stiles it, the Candle of the Lord, to light*

light us in the way, that we should go. The Prophet *Isaias* calls it, *a voice behind or within us, saying, this is the way walk in it, when we are turning either to the right hand or to the left.* St. Paul told the Gentiles, that tho' they had no written Law, yet they were a Law to themselves, their Conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing or excusing one another, Rom. 2. And withal adds, that as God hath not left himself without witness, having given sufficient notice of his Being; so he had left them, without excuse, if they did not Worship and Glorifie him as they ought.

But how does Conscience give this notice and conviction of a Deity? Why, sundry ways; as,

First, By its secret motions and suggestions, which oft-times awakens our Mind, and powerfully stirs us up to our duty to him: If we observe it, we shall find and feel something within us moving, and loudly calling upon us to that which is good; and secretly whispering and dissuading us against that which is evil: Now these are the private Notices of Conscience, which God hath set up as a Remembrancer and

and witness of him within our Breasts.  
Again,

2dly. We feel an inward delight and complacency in well-doing, and are fill'd with joy and peace in believing: Now, whence should this proceed, but from the secret notice of Conscience, which minds us of a God, and that what we have done is acceptable and well-pleasing to him? The good Man (*saith Solomon*) *is satisfied from himself*, that is from his own Conscience, which he stiles a continual Feast, that entertains him with the sweetest peace and tranquility of mind, and fills him with purer joys, than any earthly comforts can afford him, even with joy unspeakable and full of Glory, arising from a Belief that God is, and that he is a Rewarder of all those that diligently seek him. Moreover, ✓

3dly. The Sinner feels secret Stings and Lashes within, when he hath done amiss, and is inwardly troubled and perplex'd after the Commission of any Enormity; his Debaucheries grate upon his mind, and follow him with frequent fears and terrors; there is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled Sea that cannot rest.

Now,

Now, this can proceed from nothing but the inward whispers and information of Conscience, which frequently takes the Sinner aside, and rates him soundly by himself, letting him know how he hath offended his Maker, and thereby justly incur'd the dismal effects of his displeasure; hence the Sinner feels many sharp girds and twitches within, even for Sins known to none but God and himself: Which knowledge proceeds from this secret Monitor, who is both an Accuser, Witness, and Judge, all which Offices it commonly performs with great fidelity and diligence; insomuch that if there be no God to be feared by us, we might envy the happiness of brute Beasts, who have none of these frights, nor are troubled with any of these stinging Reflections: Yea Mankind, without a Deity, would be not only the most miserable, but the most ridiculous of all Creatures, to be thus terrified at nothing, and scar'd with such an imaginary Bugbear of his own making: All other Beings have some real Object of their fears; and surely Man must be the silliest of all Creatures, to be thus haunted with the dread of invisible

invifible Powers and a Judgment to come, if no fuch things were to be fear'd or expected: his Underftanding and Reafon would ferve him to good purpofe, to fuggelt fuch needlefs terrors, as to fright him with a Dream, and make him tremble at his own Shadow. So that this remorse and trouble of mind, with which the greateft Sinners are purfued, is a plain Argument of a Deity, without which no tolerable account could be given of thefe things.

But if Confcience be fo clear a proof and witness of a Deity, how comes it to pafs, that fo many deny and forget God, when they have fuch a faithful and conftant Monitor within to keep him in remembrance? why the Mifery as well as Myftery of it is, that too many filence the Voice of Confcience, and will not fuffer it to fpeak, or if (as it fometimes happens) they cannot ftop its mouth, like the deaf Adder they ftop their ear, *and refufe to hear the Voice of the Charmer, tho he charm never fo wifely*; yea, tho they are many times hard put to it to ftill the clamour and importunity of their own Minds, yet they ufe all their Arts to keep

keep it quiet, and to stifle those Convictions.

But what course do they take to effect it? Why,

Sometimes by lulling it a-sleep in a carnal security; or else, if that will not do, by hardening and searing it as with a hot Iron.

First, I say, some men to keep their Conscience quiet, endeavour to lull it a-sleep in a carnal and fatal security; and this they do by an inordinate pursuit of their sensual Lusts and Pleasures; if the serious thoughts of a God sometimes press too much upon them, they seek either to drown them in their intemperate Cups, or to stifle them by the softness of Lewdness and Dalliance: If they find their minds begin to recover out of this Lethargy, and these serious thoughts return, they have recourse to idle and loose Company to relieve themselves from the trouble of them, where they keep their Heads so hot with their frequent excesses, that they are seldom or never cool enough to consider things as they ought, and thus by bringing a continual dooziness upon their Senses, they pass away their time as in a Dream or Slumber, and  
by

by degrees fall into an utter forgetfulness of God and their Duty. But if they cannot presently thus lull their Conscience a-sleep, they endeavour,

2dly. To harden it against Conviction, and to fear it as with an hot Iron; and this they do by vicious habits contracted by a long continued custom in Sin, whereby the Mind is in a manner stupified, and made senseless of all Evil and Danger: This is such a degree of wickedness to which none can arrive presently, for *Nemo repente fuit Turpissimus*. Time is requir'd to wear off the impressions of Good and Evil; for Conscience recoils at first, and hath that natural tenderneſs, as to feel the smart, and fear the evil of ſuch courſes; till by frequent reſiſting its Calls, they have overcome this Reluctance, and made it become callous and paſt feeling; and thus by a long practice and continuance in Sin, they gradually loſe the ſenſe and awe of a Deity, and ſettle in Atheiſm and Infidelity.

Now for Men to be at ſo great pains to ſtupifie their Conſcience, and hinder it from doing its office, muſt be a very unwiſe and unſafe courſe; for this is to ſilence the Voice of God within us,  
and

and to turn the deaf Ear to our Maker ;  
yea 'tis to despise the remembrance, and  
hate the knowledge of him, and to say  
with them in *Job*, *depart from us, we  
desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

And yet after all their pains, this  
will prove in the end but a fruitless at-  
tempt, for Conscience will one time or  
other speak, and loud enough to be  
heard too, and tho it may be lull'd a-  
sleep a while, it will e're long awake,  
and ring a Peal of Vengeance in the  
Ears of all such bold and daring Sin-  
ners, as seek now to stupifie and  
silence it.

Indeed, that present senselessness and  
stupidity, which they bring upon  
their mind, serves but to render their  
condition the more desperate and re-  
mediless ; for as in bodily distempers,  
when the sense of pain is lost, the  
Patient is in greatest danger, and the  
disease proves most mortal, and incu-  
rable ; even so in spiritual Maladies,  
when the mind is past feeling, the  
Case is commonly past recovery ;  
and evermore the less sense of pain,  
the greater danger : which should teach  
us to *hearken to the voice of God and  
Conscience,*

Conscience whilst it's call'd to day, lest the Heart be hardened through the deceitfulness of Sin; before the Mind grow brawny and insensible, and fall into such a deep sleep, as nothing but Eternal Misery can awake it.

In a word, the peace and tranquility that the Mind feels from the Apprehensions of a God, shews it to be the interest of Mankind to believe, and please him, which alone can give us this hearts-ease: And likewise the terrors and frightful Apprehensions, that flow from a dissolute life, are sufficient to make all Men abhor and abandon the Cause of Atheism. I am,

S I R,

Your Faithful Friend,

A. B.

D L E T.

## LETTER IV.

SIR,

**I** Find you sensible of the hard Shifts the Atheist is put to, to silence the Voice of Conscience, and stifle the Alarms and Convictions of his own mind, together with the Folly and Danger of that Stratagem. I proceed therefore to another, and that is to ascribe the Notion of a Deity to a too great easiness of Belief, or a fond Credulity: This we find to be a frequent Plea and Objection in this case. One great Argument for the proof of a God, is taken from the Universal Consent and Agreement of Mankind in this Belief, there being nothing so generally own'd and receiv'd, in all times and places, as this Truth; and that not only among the Wise and Knowing, but even among the rudest and most ignorant part of the World: *Nulla gens tam barbara*, &c. saith the Roman Ora-

tor, There is no Nation so barbarous as not to Believe and Worship a God.

Now whence should this Universal Consent of Mankind in this Belief proceed, but from the Voice of Nature, which speaks loud enough to be heard, the sound whereof is gone through the Earth, and the Words to the end of the World? Yea, this can be no other than an Impression stamp'd on the Mind, by a Divine Hand, engraven by the Finger of God himself, and interwoven into the very Frame of our Being.

But how doth the Atheist evade this universally receiv'd Truth? Why, by charging Mankind with too great a Credulity in this matter; as if all Men beside himself, were too hasty and easie of belief, and took up this persuasion upon very slender and insufficient grounds; whereas he scorns to be thus easily led by vain talk, and to yield up his understanding to uncertain rumour: Hence the great Atheist of our Age founds all Religion upon the belief of tales publicly told, as if the Being and belief of a Deity, were built only upon a report handed down from one

to another, and had no better foundation than common Fame.

Now is not this a strange piece of rashness and presumption, for any to condemn all before or beside himself, for a company of credulous Fools and Children, that can believe any thing, and swallow the greatest difficulties, without the least reason or examination. But let us enquire a little farther into this matter.

Who was it that first rais'd this Report of a Deity? Or by whom was this Tradition began? This is matter well worth the enquiry, who made this first Discovery, or rais'd this Spirit, which all the Wisdom of the world could never conjure down since. Certainly he must have been some wise or cunning Body, that could invent and propagate so plausible a story, as to pass the Tryal of all Ages, and that none could ever find out or detect the falshood of it, sure the Fame of such a person would have been Recorded in the Annals of Time, and Posterity could never have been so unjust to his Memory, as to let him sink away in silence and oblivion: And yet the Atheist here is wholly at a loss in these things, and will neither pretend

to

to tell us the time when, the place where, or the person by whom this report first began: Only (as one hath observ'd) he thinks it probable that some body long ago (he knows not when) beyond the Memory of all Ages, did start such a notion in the World, and that it hath past for currant ever since; but if this Tradition be older than all History, why may it not have been from the beginning? And then it will be far more probable, to be a notion which was bred in the mind of Man, and born with him, than a Tradition transmitted from hand to hand through all Generations, especially being found in those barbarous Nations, that have scarce a Tradition of any thing else. But how come these Men thus to oppose the general Sense of Mankind, and to call in question so universally own'd and receiv'd a Truth? Why! this proceeds,

Partly from their great unwillingness to believe it, which makes them take hold of any, even the meanest shifts, to countenance their unbelief.

And Partly from an Affectation of Singularity, whereby they would be thought

wiser and more knowing, than any that went before them, that they see farther into matters than other Men, and that their Understandings are by head and shoulders taller than their Brethren; they know well enough, that should they go on with the common herd, and say and do as others that have gone before them, they should be thought to be no wiser than they; and therefore that they may set up for Wits, and be accounted Men of a deeper reach and insight into things, than others, they strike out of the common road, and go a new untrodden way by themselves; this makes them look upon the belief of a Deity, (tho' confirm'd by the general consent of Mankind) to be only the effect of weakness and want of judgment, that they who entertain it, are merely carried away with the Stream, and like easie credulous persons, take up things upon trust, from the uncertain Hear-say and Report of others no wiser than themselves; Whereas they, like Men of judgment, believe and act by another Rule; and where their own Reason cannot convince them of a truth, there no Authority of others shall sway them

them to the belief of it. And thus by a vain conceit and affectation of Singularity, they leave the track in which all others have gone before them, which unawares bewilders and leads them into Atheism.

But is it a vain Credulity, to embrace a Truth confirm'd by the Consent and Approbation of all Mankind? or is it any piece of Wisdom, to set up a single opinion against the Wisdom of the whole World? No, far from it; the wisest of Men hath told us, that he that is wise in his own conceit is a fool; and certainly he must be extremely so, that thinks himself wiser than all Men beside him: Indeed, to keep the mind from being enslav'd to precarious and Vulgar Notions, or receiving things upon trust without examination, is to assert the freedom of the Understanding, which very well becomes a wise Man to do; but to reject an Opinion merely because it hath been universally receiv'd, is a rudeness offer'd to the Reason of Mankind; for if many heads may be suppos'd to be wiser than one, that wherein all Heads concenter and agree, ought in Reason to be prefer'd before any single opinion; and there-

fore to quarrel with a Truth, for no other reason, but because it hath been own'd and embrac'd by all, is an unpardonable piece of pride and singularity; for this makes Men overvalue themselves, and set too low a price upon the judgment of their betters, which is a high piece of arrogance and folly: Yea by this means they deprive themselves of the benefit and assistance of other Mens Understandings, and leaning wholly upon their own, are thereby often betray'd into great errors and miscarriages.

'Tis true, we are forbid to *follow a multitude in doing Evil*, but not in receiving Truth, which is the greatest good we can do to our selves or others: And tho' we are bid *to try all things*, yet we are requir'd *to hold fast that which is good*, and not to start aside from the belief of that which hath past the tryal and approbation of all Times and Ages.

There is (as one hath well observ'd) a Reverence due to the Judgment of Mankind, and that which hath been receiv'd by all or most Men, hath been ever thought most worthy of acceptance:

ception : yea the laws of modesty require us to think others better than our selves, and to suspect our own Judgment, when it crosses theirs ; for tho' the generality of Men may be sometimes mistaken, which should therefore put us upon the stricter search and enquiry into Truth, yet to be over positive and confident against the universal Sense and Belief of Mankind, is to resist the clearest evidence we can have, and to run counter to the greatest probabilities.

But what if these great Masters of Wit should all this while be found the most Credulous and easie of belief of all Men ? what then will become of all these vain Boasts and Pretensions to Reason ? And yet this is as clear as the Sun at Noon-day ; for they believe many things without the least colour and shadow of reason ; and deny others that have all possible evidence of truth ; both which are apparent instances of a gross and absurd Credulity.

They believe that there is no God, and consequently that 'tis impossible there should be one, a thing which no Art of Man ever could or pretended to demonstrate.

Again,

Again, they believe either that the World was never made, or if it were, that 'twas made by chance, and that all things in it came into that excellent order they now are, by mere fortune; which shews that they can believe at random, and take up the most absurd *Hypothesis* at a venture. Again,

They believe that tho' matter be in it self a dull and senseless thing, utterly incapable of Reason and Understanding, yet there can be no spiritual or immaterial Being to influence or actuate it. In a Word,

The Atheist can believe against all the Sense and Reason of all Mankind, and think all the World beside himself to consist only of Fools and Knaves; a bold *Brittain*! And yet those and many other are the goodly Articles of the Atheist's *Creed*, which he that can swallow, must be a man of strong Faith or vast Credulity, and must believe with his Will, not with his Understanding. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

---

 LETTER V.
 

---

S I R,

**A**Nother Device of the Atheist is to resolve the Belief of a God into the Principles and Prejudices of Education : This Device is near a-kin to and grounded upon the former, and pretends to give some account of the spring and rise of this Credulity ; which he takes to be from the first impressions of Education ; this being the first Notion instill'd by Parents into their Children, as soon as they come to understand any thing, and is improv'd by those who have the Education and Management of them ever after.

And here they observe, what deep impressions are made upon the Mind, by the first things we hear or learn ; how long they are wont to continue with us, and how ready Men are to communicate them to one another, and more especially to derive them to their

their offspring : From whence they think such a general belief of a Deity may easily be suppos'd in time to obtain, and be transmitted down from hand to hand through all Generations.

Now here the Question may be ask'd again, Who was the first person that invented and convey'd down this Notion? what was his name or his Son's name, that we may know him? how came he to entertain it himself? who taught it him? and how came he so readily to believe and propagate it to Posterity? Why, of all this the Atheist can give no manner of account, unless he will flye to the Holy Scripture, and say, that *Adam* the first Man had it from God, and taught it to his Children, and so convey'd it down to all Generations; but this would be to yield up the Cause, and to acknowledge a first Being and Maker of all things, which yet he is very unwilling to grant.

Besides, that this is a precarious and groundless Hypothesis, may plainly appear from this, that Men in all Ages have been known to be of different tempers, and to have had various and different ways and methods of Education,

on, by which means they have receiv'd different Impressions, and entertain'd various Sentiments of things : And yet we find all Men, in all times, and of all tempers (tho' differing never so much in other things) to agree and concenter in this belief of a God, which shews it to have another and higher Principle than that of Education.

Again, if we consult the frame and make of our Being, we shall find this Notion of a Deity stamp'd upon our very Natures, and that in such plain and legible Characters, as may easily shew whose workmanship we are, and out of what hands we came ; and this too in persons of no Education, and before any thing was instill'd into them by it, which farther proves it to proceed from a higher Cause : To all which if we add moreover, That strong and powerful Inclination that is found in all Men to worship a God, we shall find this to go before, and not to be planted in them by Education : If we survey the World, we may observe a natural proneness and propensity to Religion, even in the most barbarous and uncultivated parts of it ; all of them every where conspiring

ring together to worship something or other as a God: Now this cannot possibly be owing only to Education, which may indeed direct, but cannot infuse these Inclinations; he that created the Soul, could alone put that bias into it, that draws so strong to the adoration of him; for the best nurture can no more put such new Inclinations, than it can put a new Nature into us: So that this universal Inclination to religious Worship must proceed from something within, that is born with us, and is connatural to our Being; and can no more flow from any thing imprinted on our Minds from without, than the natural Passions of Hope and Fear are owing to the impressions of outward Objects.

But here the Atheist tells us, That this Argument taken from an universal Inclination to worship a Deity, will hold as strong for Polytheism and Idolatry, as for a Unity of the Godhead; there being as great, if not a greater part of the World led by it to worship many false Gods than one true one.

Now to this, which is all the Atheist hath to say in this case, sundry answers may be given. As,

*First,*

~ *First*, The Assertion on which the Objection is grounded is a great mistake, for the greatest and wisest part of Mankind have ever paid their Adorations to one Supreme Being : As for the Jewish Nation, the whole body of them serv'd one only God, known by the name *Jehovah*, as is evident from Prophane as well as Sacred History ; and for the other Nations, that deriv'd their Pedigree and Tradition from them, they had always one above the rest whom they worshipp'd with the highest acts of Adoration : Indeed some of the grosser Heathens multiplied their Gods, according to the multitude and variety of Blessings they suppos'd to receive from them ; but these were derided by the Philosophers and more knowing Men, and the practice of the Multitude without the opinion and approbation of the Wise, signifies no more (as one hath told us in this case) than many Cyphers without a Figure.

Again, *Secondly*, The Polytheism of the Heathens is a good argument against Atheism, and their Idolatries are a plain proof of a Deity ; for the rudest and most ignorant of all people have had those impressions of him upon their

their Mind, that they would rather have many Gods than be without any, and worship false Gods rather than none at all. Tho' they mistook the true God, yet they all agreed in this, to worship some God or other; and this mistake of theirs was not for want of sufficient Evidence, but from the neglect or abuse of their natural Reason, which led them from the true to false Gods, *For when they knew God (saith the Apostle) they worshipped him not as God, and therefore their foolish hearts were darkened.* Moreover,

Lastly, the many false Gods of the Heathen are a plain proof that there is one true one, for all Counterfeits suppose a Reality; there would be no false Coin, if there were none true; all Images are intended to represent something that is real; neither would any Idols be set up, if there were not a true God to be worshipped. In short then, the Notion of a Deity must be founded in Nature, because 'tis universal; and could not be acquired by Education, it being found in those that never had any.

Beside, nothing is lasting but what is natural; for the best things acquir'd  
by

by Instruction, have in many persons been lost and forgotten; and consequently the Notion of a God would have fail'd in time, and the Worship of him ceas'd in many places, if it had no firmer Principle.

Seeing then that both these have continued through all Times and Ages, and are still found in all Persons and Places, yea, since the Atheist himself can scarce wear off the Impression, or rid his Mind of the awe and sense of a Deity, 'tis a poor shift to resolve the Belief and Worship of him into the Principles and Prejudices of Education. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

E

LET-

---



---

## LETTER VI.

S I R,

**I** Shew'd in my last, That the Impressions of Education could not create, but must suppose a Deity, and that the knowledge and belief we have of him, is owing not so much to the outward Instructions we learn from others, as the inward Inclinations implanted in our own Mind ; which are not taught, but born with us.

But if the Atheist cannot solve this great Phenomenon, or account for so general a Credulity this way, he hath another Device for that purpose ; and that is to ascribe the belief and worship of a God to *Fear*, or a superstitious dread of some invisible Powers : And this he thinks cannot fail to do it. For the mind of Man (he tells us) and of some especially, is mightily subject to the impressions of Fear, which are wont to sink deep and continue long with them ; and these again are apt to im-

print

print the same dread on the Minds of others; which being discover'd and communicated, fill melancholy heads with infinite Fears and Jealousies, which at length increase into a general awe and dread of such a Being: so that Men are frighted into this belief by the frequent talk of a God, as Children are into the fear of Spirits by the Tales of Faries and Hobgoblins; and for this they quote that noted saying of the Poet,

*Primus in Orbe Deos fecit Timor.*

Fear first made Gods: Men being scar'd with some Jealousies arising in their Minds about it, and terrified with the thoughts of what might happen.

Now here by this Assertion, the Atheist grants that the Minds of Men are generally seiz'd and possess'd with the Fears and Apprehensions of a God, which is too well known and felt, to be call'd in question: So that the main enquiry here is, whether Fear can create this Being; or whether such a Being may not rather create these Fears? for since all other Passions pre-

suppose their Object, it is not to be conceiv'd how fear alone should make it; if there be a God, that presides over all things, and inspects our ways, there is great reason to fear him; but if there be none, 'tis not to be imagin'd, how fear should make such a Being, or create such an universal Belief in Mankind, that there is one. But how come so many to fear, where no fear is? what makes Men indow'd with Reason thus to be scar'd with their own shadow? or if some such timorous creatures may be found, that are apt to be frighted with the terrors of their own fancy, How come all Mankind to be seiz'd with these panick fears? what should create such an universal trembling? or rivet this frightful Idea so deep into Mens Minds, that no Art or Endeavours can root it out?

Why, of this no account can be given without a Deity? which might well enough imprint this dread upon them, from a sense of his infinite Power and Greatness.

Indeed, 'tis easie to conceive how Infinite Power and Justice may cause a dread; but 'tis not to be imagin'd, how

how dread should be the cause of such infinite perfections.

Again, it may be asked whether this Fear were before or after a Deity? if it be affirm'd to be before, as it must be, if Fear be the Cause of him; the Cause being ever before the Effect; it will follow, that something may be before that which is Eternal; for since the Notion of a God implies a Being that existed from all Eternity, if Fear preceeded, and made this Being, it must have been before Eternity, and likewise give a Being to that, which never had or could have any beginning; both which are manifest contradictions.

If this Fear be said to be after a Deity, then it could not be the Cause of him; forasmuch as no Effect can be before, but must still come after the Cause.

Whence then should this fear proceed, by which Men are aw'd into this Belief? Why, it must proceed either from the suggestions and report of others, or from the inward suggestions of our own Mind.

If it came from the Relation and suggestions of others, it may be ask'd, who suggested it to them? And this enquiry

not cease, till it be trac'd up to the first Author; in which the Atheist is at the same loss as he was before, in running up the rise of this Tradition.

If these Fears proceed from the inward suggestions of our own Mind, which is apt to fancy terrible things; it may be ask'd, who or what is it that brings to mind those terrible things, and occasions those suggestions? Why this can be nothing but the sense of some invisible Powers, whom we have some way or other offended, which may cause some remorse, and imprint some fears of his displeasure: And let the Atheist give any other account of it, if he can.

Beside, does not the Notion of a God imply a Being of infinite Mercy and Goodness, that is always ready to take care of, to support and comfort his Creatures? And since the Object of Fear is always something that is dreadful, how can Fear create the Belief of such a Being, which is rather the Object of desire than dread, and deserves muchmore to be lov'd and wish'd for, than to be fear'd by us? So that fear alone, could never produce this Noble Effect; it might indeed beget an opinion of some stern, sour, and severe

severe Being, to be dreaded and shun'd by all that hear of him; but could never form a Notion of a Gracious, Merciful, and tender-hearted Lord, that is to be lov'd and desir'd by all that know him: And therefore the Atheist to make his *Hypothesis* the more plausible, must join Love and Hope to Fear, to compleat this Glorious and Divine Atchievement.

Moreover, the Love of so benign, gracious, and amiable a Being, is sufficient to overcome and expel fear, and nothing but the sollicitation of sensual Lusts, could keep Mankind from admiring and doteing upon him: *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment, he that feareth is not made perfect in love: 1 John 4. 18.*

Indeed the Love and Relation we bear to a bountiful Creator may well enough admit of a filial fear, consisting in an unwillingness to offend or displease him; but no servile tormenting fear can consist with the love that is due to so excellent a Being.

So that Fear is so far from making a God, that it tends rather (if it were possible) to unmake him, to turn him in-

to a Tyrant, and consequently to make him the object of our hatred and aver-sation ; for he that hath such dreadful Apprehensions, cannot but wish there were no God, and from thence is but one remove from believing there is none. Yea,

This slavish fear tends to bebase Man-kind, and even to unmake him too, by degrading him to a lower Species, for *Degeneres animos Timor Arguit*. Such a fear sinks him beneath the dignity of his Nature, and makes him like the Beast that perisheth. Furthermore,

If there were no Being of such infinite Perfections to employ our Contem- plation, the highest and noblest faculties of the Soul would be vain and useless ; the Understanding would want an Ob- ject suitable to the Capacity of its Ap- prehension ; the Will would have none commensurate to the largeness of its desires ; the Affections would be desti- tute of an object worthy of its Love and Complacence ; yea Fear it self would want both an Object and a Reason for those frequent terrors, that haunt and assault the Mind. Now there being no Power or Faculty in the meanest Crea- ture, but what there is some Reason  
and

and Use for, can it be conceiv'd that the Noblest Faculties of the Soul should be planted in it in vain, and become all uselefs for want of a suitable Object to employ them.

In short, if there were no God, Mankind would have nothing but temporal good things to desire, and nothing but temporal Evils to fear; of both which the brute Beasts have a quicker sense than he: Yea his Reason, which is the Perfection and Glory of Humane Nature, would serve for no other end, but to be a Caterer to the Senses, and provide for the gratification of a Carnal Appetite, which may be as well if not better gratified without than with it: So that without a Deity, as all Fear would be in vain, so all the superior Faculties of the Soul, *viz.* Understanding and Reason, would be uselefs and insignificant, as having no Object fit to exercise or entertain them. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

L E T.

## LETTER VII.

SIR,

**I** Find you sensible in your last, that Fear could not be the Cause, but the Effect and Consequent of a Belief of a Deity; and that no tolerable Reason can be given of the natural fear and dread of a God, if there were no such Being: So that the Atheist being beaten out of this Subterfuge; I proceed in this to

Another Device, which he seeks to take shelter in, and that is, to ascribe the Notion of a Deity, to State-policy, and to make the Belief of it a Contrivance of cunning Men, to keep the World in awe.

This is a new Device invented and propagated by some in this latter Age, who (as a great Man hath told us) imagine that some great Prince or Politician, like *Nebuchadnezzar*, set up this image of a Deity, and commanded all People and Nations to fall down and  
*Worship*

*Worship it:* And this being found an useful Engine of State, to keep Men in obedience to Government, hath been receiv'd by all Princes and States ever since. A goodly device indeed! and no doubt the issue of some wise and politick Head-piece; and to make it the more plausible; they insist at large, upon the Reason why it should be cherish'd and countenanc'd by all Princes, *viz.* Because of the good influence it hath upon the awing the People into Obedience. Again,

They tell us of the Peoples readiness to comply with the humours and practices of Princes, who giving their Example and Encouragement herein, are easily followed and imitated by their Subjects: by which means this Notion, having the Stamp of Authority upon it, hath pass'd current, and is generally embrac'd and kept up in the World: This is the sum of what they have to say in this Matter. Now here we may observe,

1. That this Device plainly supposes the Usefulness of Religion, towards the Peace and Welfare of Mankind, and how greatly it conduces to the good Order and Government of the World; which

which shews it to be the interest of Mankind to wish it true ; and this (one would think) should rather incline Men to embrace, than evade so useful a Notion.

But by whom was this Engine of State devis'd? where or when did this great Prince or Politician live, that first found out this *Arcanum imperii*, this great Secret or Mystery of Government? what proof is there alledg'd for any such Contrivance? Why, none at all; no discovery hath been yet made of the Author of this Invention; it still remains a Mystery, as well as an Engine of State, a Cobweb spun out of some fanciful and subtle Brain; in a Word, tis a mere Conjecture, taken up without the least appearance of Reason, or proof for any part of it.

Indeed, The thing appears in it self unpracticable ; for how is it possible for the wisest Politician to rivet such a Notion into the Minds of all Men, that should never get out? where is the Person that ever did such a feat? and if no such one be any where to be found, we may safely conclude the deep  
and

and lasting impressions of a Deity upon Mens Minds, to proceed not from the Art of Man, but from the Finger of God.

Beside, this is an improbable way of compassing the design; for the subtlest Politicians are wont to work upon the inclinations they find planted in Mens Nature; but do not hope to put new ones into them: They are wise enough to know, that Men are more easily led, than driven; and therefore chuse rather to make use of those Principles they find them already possess'd of, than go about to infuse new. Hence it comes to pass, that Princes reap the benefits of Peace and Order from Principles they never sowed in the hearts of their Subjects, but found planted there; and 'tis most certain, that the People are much more aw'd and kept to their duty, by the natural impressions of Religion, than by any artificial Methods of Policy or Contrivance: So that Politicians promote their ends, not by making but finding Religion in the Minds of Men; for tho' Reason of State may cherish, it can never create the Notion of a Deity.

But

But have Princes or Politicians been more free from the Fears of a Deity, or the Terrors of another World, than other Men? This would be, if Religion were only a Device or Engine of State: whereas we see and find the quite contrary, for they have the same sense and impressions of these things with other Men, and can no more rid their Minds of them, than the meanest of their Subjects: History tells us, how some of the *Roman* Emperors were wont to be frighted with the noise of Thunder; as thinking it to be the voice of God: We read how *Caligula* us'd to creep under a Bed at the sound of it, taking it for a sign of the anger and displeasure of Heaven; and we read of many other great Persons and States-men, who have been alarm'd with the fears of a God, and the terrors of another World: Now if Religion were only a Juggle of State, or a politick Device of cunning Men; how come they to be thus terrified with their own Contrivance? Men are not wont to be affrighted with Bugbears of their own making, or to tremble at that which they know

to

to be a mere scarecrow ; 'tis plain, the greatest and wisest persons that have ever been, have known of no such Cheat in Religion, for if they had, no account could be given of those fears and troubles of Conscience, which they in all Ages had about it.

Beside, 'tis hard to conceive, how all the Princes and Potentates of the Earth should agree together to entertain a Fiction ; and tho' they have such different Designs and Interests, should yet conspire to devise and promote a Notion that is void of all Reason or Truth.

Or if they could, how is it to be imagin'd, that the People should be all so ready to receive it ? They are not wont so easily to believe their Governours upon their bare Word, or embrace a Notion that hath so plain a design upon their Peace and Welfare : Yea the more subtle and politic they take their Governours to be, the more they are apt to suspect them ; and to pry into the Reasons of their Counsels and Intentions.

Lastly, if the Notion of a God were only a politic Contrivance to keep the World in awe, or a Device fram'd in  
some

some Mens heads, to cozen others into obedience to them, how comes it to pass, that this was never discover'd in any Age? Sure it would have been found out one time or other; Cheats do not always continue undiscover'd; Truth commonly breaks out, and Time lays open the Imposture: if then this pretended Secret was never known or discover'd by any, but remains still as much a Secret as ever, we may very well conclude it to be it self a Juggle and Fiction of some Mens brain; or a Device of the Atheist to cozen and deceive himself. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

---

## LETTER VIII.

S I R,

**W**Hen the Atheist is driven out of the Refuge of State-policy, and can neither tell the person by whom, or the time when this Engine of State was invented, He flies to

Another

Another Device, which is to resolve the Notion and Belief of a God into common Compact : An account whereof is briefly this.

That Mankind, for the better preservation of Human Society, by common Consent form'd this Notion of a God, which they generally agreed together to embrace; and finding the benefit and good influence of it upon the publick welfare, have by common Compact preserv'd and kept it up ever since : A notable Account indeed ! which shews that some Men will believe any thing, rather than what they should.

However this account farther grants the Usefulness of Religion to the welfare of Human Society, which is indeed so necessary to it, that 'tis impossible it should long subsist or continue without it ; for Religion is the Bond or Cement that holds all the parts of it together, and gives all the force and efficacy to the Laws by which 'tis upheld : All the Obligations of Conscience, which alone can keep Men to their duty, result from the Belief of a God ; without which, no ties of Oaths, Promises, or Engagements, could hold Men either to Honesty or Obedience : So that the usefulness and necessity of this Notion to the welfare of Mankind, should methinks en-

F

cline

cline all Men to entertain it, to wish it true, and to give all the strength that may be to the Arguments brought to confirm it; for he that endeavours to evade this Truth, is an Enemy not only to himself, but to the Happiness and Tranquility of Human Society, and does what in him lies to destroy the Peace and Welfare of Mankind.

But when and where was this general Meeting of Mankind, in which they form'd this Notion of a Deity, and enter'd into this solemn Compact to Believe and propagate it? Who summon'd or call'd them together from all the remote parts of the World? Or did they happen luckily to come and meet together by Chance? Sure, some History or other of the World would have Recorded this grand Assembly of Mankind for this purpose, which, if it ever were, was one of the most memorable things that hath been ever acted in it. But since no account hath been ever given of such a Meeting, we may conclude it to be a meer figment, to be met with no where but in an Atheistical brain.

But if the Atheist could get over this difficulty, which is indeed insuperable, there are many other in this unaccountable Compact, in which he must be unavoidably intangl'd; for how came all the inhabitants

habitants of all places and Countries, so unanimously to jump and agree together in this Notion? When there is scarce any little Town or City, where such an entire Agreement is to be found in matters of opinion, how incredible is it that all the People in the World, of the most distant Places, and the most different Humours, Interests, and Inclinations, should all agree together in framing this Notion, and so universally conspire in the Belief of it?

Beside, how came this Notion fram'd by them, to be so generally receiv'd by all Posterity ever since? was this Covenant and Compact of theirs so made, as to bind all their Heirs and Successors for ever? Or how come all Generations so readily to take themselves to be bound by it? especially when no Instrument or Evidence can be produc'd, when and where this Agreement was ratified; certainly, this is more than was ever known of any other Compact or Agreement either before or since.

Moreover, are there not some Places and Persons so rude, as to be without any Commerce or Correspondence, with other Nations? And how came they to hear of this Compact, or to think themselves bound by it? Sure, they must be mighty credulous, who can receive a

matter of so great importance upon such slender Evidence, and take themselves to be oblig'd by a Contract which they never heard of; especially in a thing that sits so uneasie upon the Minds of many, whose interest and wish it is that it were not true: For are there not some very desirous to rid themselves of the disquieting Fear and Belief of a God? do not too many labour hard to cast off this Check, which tends so much to restrain their Lusts, and abridge their Pleasures? And if this Belief depended only on such a precarious Contract, contriv'd and made they know not where, or by whom, would they not soon find a way to get out of it?

These and many other absurdities attend this Device, which he that can swallow, may be indeed a Man of little Faith, but of vast Credulity; he must cease to blame any for easiness of Belief, that can give his assent upon such slender grounds; and if the Atheist can build his Confidence upon no better Foundation, he must no longer set up for a Man of Wit or Reason, nor pretend to any other demonstration, but that of his own folly.

How much more rational is it, to conclude the Notion of a Deity to be a Principle of Divine infusion, than an Article of Human Contract? and the Belief of it

to

to be rather founded in Nature than built upon Artifice and Agreement? Is it likely that the Idea of a Being absolutely perfect, infinitely wise, just, and gracious, the Omnipotent and glorious Maker and Preserver of all things, should be merely fram'd by Compact? or that the whole World should universally agree to profess and worship such a Being, if there were no such thing? Is not this at once to impose upon the Reason of Mankind, and to reflect upon the Honour of our Maker, to make him a Creature of our own Fancies, and the Effect of Human Contrivance? There is no Compact but what may be and hath in time been laid aside; and if this Belief neither hath nor can be totally eras'd, it owes its rise to a higher Principle, and must be more deeply rooted in the Minds of Men. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

F 3 L E T.

## ✓ LETTER IX.

S I R,

**H**AVING shew'd the vanity of the Atheist's Pleas in accounting for the Universal Tradition and Consent of Mankind in the Belief of a God, if there were no such Being ;

I come now to another Device, made use of to rid their Minds of him ; and that is to deny the Notion and Being of a Spirit, as a thing impossible or incredible in Nature, and unconceivable by the Understanding : And herein they are the followers of the Sadduces, who denied *Angels and Spirits*, and thereby the immortality of the Soul, *and the Resurrection of the dead* ; which great Articles of Faith are call'd in question, and the Objections against them greedily receiv'd and vented by the Modern Atheists of our Age, who take the Notion of a Spirit for a vain chimerical thing, that hath no existence but in the deluded Fancies of some melancholy and mistaken Persons.

Now this disbelief of Spirits is only to make way for the denial of a God, who  
being

being of a Spiritual and immaterial Nature must be set aside together with them. And hence they would perswade the World, that Men in believing a Deity, are only haunted with an imaginary Apparition, and merely scar'd with the Dreams and Phantasms of their own Brain.

But why may not some Beings be conceiv'd to exist without Matter, as well as others with it? is Matter, which is but the drossy part and dregs of the Universe, so necessary and essential to Being, that 'tis not possible for any to be without it? where lies the contradiction of an immaterial Substance, that it should be so hard to be conceiv'd? nay, does not the Purity and Perfection of some Beings require us to abstract from Matter in our conceptions of them? and to ascribe the Excellency of their Operations to a Principle really distinct from it? Is not Matter of it self an unactive, dull, and sluggish thing, void of all sense and understanding? and does it not require a more refined Substance to give it Motion and activity? What is the Body but a dead, heavy, and lumpish Carcass, without a Soul to actuate and enliven it? neither would the Angels be the nimble and swift-winged Messengers of Heaven, if they were

F 4

clogg'd

clogg'd with Matter, to check and retard their Motion. If we Mount up in our Contemplations to the Supreme Being and maker of all things, we must conceive of him as an Eternal, Independant and Spiritual Substance, void of all Corporeity and Matter, and subsisting of himself, by the absolute fulness of his own Nature; for the Notion of a God implies a Being that hath all possible Perfections, and therefore we are so to conceive of him, as to abstract and remove from all manner of defect and imperfection: Now materiality is a great defect in the Being to which it belongs; for beside that 'tis a clog to its activity, it confines and limits it to one place, and so is opposite to the Immensity, Omnipresence and Omniscience of a Deity, who as it made Heaven and Earth by his Power, so must be suppos'd to fill both with his Presence.

Again, Matter makes a thing to be Divisible, and consequently liable to Dissolution, which is utterly inconsistent with the Eternity, and other Perfections of the Divine Nature: So that Reason wills us to abstract from the imperfections of Matter in our apprehensions of a God, and to conceive of him as a Spiritual and immaterial Substance.

But

But how comes the Atheist to take this for an irrational or unintelligible Notion? Why, he tells us that all the knowledge we have of things, comes from our Senses; and since we cannot see or feel a Spirit, nor arrive to the knowledge of it by any of our Senses, we can form no Idea of such a thing.

But is nothing to be believ'd, but what we have some information of from our Senses? How then shall we believe we have a Soul, of which none of our Senses can give us any information? for if it be at all, it must be a Spiritual and immaterial Substance, which cannot incur into or be discern'd by any of them: Beside, are there not many noble Effects and Operations that proceed from an invisible Cause? Do we not find, that we can reason, judge, and inferr one thing from another, tho' we see not the Principle from whence they come? Have we not an Understanding, Will, and Affections, to know, chuse, and affect things, tho' the Spring of them occur not to any of our Senses? Do we not find a World made and preserv'd, tho' we see not that invisible hand that first did the one, and still continues the other?

Indeed, had we no higher Principle of knowledge in us, than our Senses, it would be hard to form a Notion of God,

or

or any Spiritual and immaterial Substance, because these things cannot be the Object of Sensation ; but having a superior Principle, that is a Mind within us, that can raise us above all gross and Corporeal Objects ; 'tis easie to conceive that a Spiritual Substance may be discern'd by the Mind, tho' it cannot be the Object of our Senses ; Are there not many Truths in all Arts and Sciences, that fall not under the Cognizance of any of our Senses ? Yea, are not the Essences of all things invisible, and discoverable only by the Powers and Sagacity of the Mind, which from the outward Effects, can judge of the inward Nature of the Causes ? The Understanding can penetrate much farther into the inside of things, than our Senses or Fancy can enable us to do ; we find the Mind can and frequently does correct the Errors of Sense and Imagination, of which many instances might be given, if it were needful to enlarge.

But this is sufficient to make it evident, that there is a higher Principle of Knowledge within us, than that of our outward Senses ; and that many things are knowable and intelligible by the one, that are not convey'd by the other : So that 'tis false Reasoning to infer, that the Mind cannot have a Notion or Idea of a Spiritual  
and

and immaterial Substance, because it cannot be the Object of Sensation.

Again, the Atheist tells us, that the Notion of a God supposes him to be Infinite and Incomprehensible, and therefore it must be altogether unconceiveable by Human Understanding, which cannot grasp Infinity, or comprehend what is Incomprehensible.

But may not the Mind apprehend something of a Deity, tho' it cannot comprehend the whole of him? Is it wise arguing, because we have not all knowledge, therefore we have none at all? If we know as much of him, as the greatness of the Object, and the slenderness of our Faculties will admit; that is, if we know him to be a Being absolutely and eminently perfect, without the least degree of defect or imperfection, is not this sufficient to create a Notion and Belief of him? There is scarce any inferior Being that we can fully comprehend, and because we understand not all Mysteries in Nature, shall we conclude from thence, that we are quite ignorant, and can have no Notion or Idea of any thing? This will lead to downright Scepticism, and make us believe we know nothing. Beside, we may know as much of him, as 'tis fit for us now to know; we are not at present able to receive the full

full knowledge and splendor of the Deity, a great part whereof is reserv'd for the Happinels of a future State, when *we shall see God, as he is*; and tho' we here *know but in part, shall then know even as we are known*; and therefore 'tis monstrously unreasonable to quarrel with the Notion and Idea of a God, or think it altogether unconceivable, because we cannot comprehend his infinite Perfections, in this present imperfect state, wherein we know but little of any thing else.

But how does the Atheist account for all these noble Effects and Operations of the Mind, without the Notion of a Spirit? Why, by resolving all into Matter and Motion: For he tells us, that some of the finer and more subtle parts of Matter, call'd Atoms, being in continual motion, luckily fall into those configurations, by which all this is perform'd without the help or direction of a Deity: And that some happen to be wiser and more knowing than others, proceeds from some of those more refined parts of Matter falling accidentally into more happy forms and contextures in them, than they do in others, and so instead of believing in God, they believe only in Matter and Motion. A great piece of *Subtilty indeed!* to sublimate Matter into Spirit, and to ascribe the Noblest

blest Acts and Operations in the World, to the most unactive and sluggish of all things in it. But whence should Matter have this Motion, which neither is nor hath in it any self-moving Principle? Why, of this no account can be given without some Spiritual Being, that must give it all its activity. Can dull Matter of it self infer one thing from another, and perform those reflex Acts, which we find in rational Beings? Can it range the Universe in Thought and Contemplation? Or dive into profound Speculations? No, these things require another and higher Principle, than stupid and senseless Matter, and owe their rise to some more refin'd, spiritual, and intelligent Being.

In short, The Notion of a Spirit is so necessary to the solving of these and a thousand other difficulties, that none but such as are wholly immers'd in Matter can doubt or disbelieve it. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

LET-

## L E T T E R X.

S I R,

**A**Nother Device of the Atheist, is his taking occasion from the unequal distribution of Earthly Things, to question both the Being and Providence of a God: They see Good Men afflicted, and the Wicked in great prosperity; which they think could not be, if the World were govern'd by so Wise, Just, and Excellent a Being as is pretended.

This is a Quarrel of an ancient date, or an old stumbling Block, that hath trip'd up the Heels of many: We read of it in *David's* days, who was himself in great danger of stumbling at it; for himself tells us, that *his Feet were almost gone, and his Steps had well nigh slipt, when he saw the Wicked in great prosperity; that they were not in trouble like other folk, not plagued like other Men; but were lusty and strong, their Eyes standing out with Fatness, having as much as heart could wish; whilst better men than they look'd meager and thin, being pinch'd with want, and chastened every morning:* This made him begin to doubt, whether

whethe: there were any wise and Supreme Being that order'd these things: *I beheld* (saith he) *the Ungodly flourishing like a green Bay-tree*, and the Righteous Man at the same time drooping and hanging the head like a whither'd leaf; *verily I have cleans'd my heart in vain, and washed mine hands in innocency*: Meaning, that he had taken pains to be Religious to no purpose, when others that neglected it, far'd much better than he.

Again, we find these things objected in the days of *Plutarch*, *Seneca*, and other Heathen Moralists, who by the bare help of Natural Light, went a great way to the solving of this Riddle of Divine Providence: Tho' many of the Poets concluded the World to be govern'd by blind Chance and Fortune, from the promiscuous event and distribution of these things: And there are but too many still, who observing the Miseries of Good Men, and the Prosperities of bad, are led to arraign the Justice of Providence, and from thence to deny the very Being of a God.

But is this any tolerable Plea for Atheism? No, in no wise; for some of the wiser and soberer Heathens have discover'd such weighty Reasons for this kind of dealing with the Sons of Men, as are abundantly sufficient to vindicate the Justice of Divine

Divine Providence ; God's forbearing the Wicked, may be to propound the Example of his Goodness and Patience, to give them time for Amendment, to leave them without excuse, and to make their Punishment the more terrible and remarkable at last. Beside,

Their Prosperity is not so great as we vainly imagine, for 'tis oft-times embitter'd with the sting of an evil Conscience, and attended with fearful Expectations of Wrath, and the Terrors of an approaching Judgment.

Neither are the Sufferings of the Righteous founded on less weighty Causes ; for these are no other than the Discipline and Corrections of a Heavenly Father, for their future good : They are design'd merely for the exercises of patience, and the tryals of their Faith and Constancy, which if manfully born, will tend to the encrease of their Reward, and add a greater weight and lustre to their Crown of Glory.

These with many other Considerations of great Moment, sufficient to solve this difficulty, you may find insisted on at large by *Plutarch*, *Epictetus*, *Simplicius*, *Seneca*, and others, to whom I refer you ; all which being the plain discoveries of Natural Reason, render this Objection so far from

from any just Plea for Atheism, that 'tis a plain proof of the contrary, and may make all Men say, *verily there is a God, that judgeth the Earth.*

But how then come Men to be so misled by this means; or where lies the mistake in this matter? Why, this proceeds partly from a fond and immoderate estimation of worldly Prosperity; and partly, likewise,

From some wrong Notions, that are entertain'd about the Afflictions and Miseries of this present Life. For when Men so overvalue the good things of this World, as to think it impossible for any to be happy without them; and so mistake the Evils and Adversities of it, as to judge all Men miserable and unhappy that fall under them; 'tis no wonder, if they accuse the dispensations of Providence, and quarrel with the manager and disposer of them: He that takes Wealth and Honour to be the sole Rewards of Virtue, and consequently to be the proper Lot and Portion of Righteous Men, may be easily induc'd to complain of the hard fate of good Men, that want them; and he that hath such terrible apprehensions of Adversity, as to look upon it as the punishment and wages of Unrighteousness, may envy and applaud the good Fortune of bad Men, who

G

so

so often escape them. Now both these are gross mistakes, and have unhappily led some Men into Atheism.

To Rectifie which, you must know, that Affliction is sometimes a greater Blessing than Prosperity; the one serving to make Men better, the other worse. There be few that, in *Pindar's* Phrase, can *κατὰ πέψαι μέγαν ὄλβον*, rightly manage great Prosperity: Yea, too many are undone by it to Eternity, and make that, which was design'd for their good, become the Instrument of their ruin. But

Where lies the danger of Prosperity? Why,

First, It tempts many unto Pride, and makes them too apt to forget both God and themselves; *Jesurun waxed Fat and kicked*, his Abundance made him bold and insolent, and lifted up both his Heart and his Heel too against his Maker: *David* observ'd of the wicked that prosper'd in his days, that *Pride compassed them about as a chain, and violence cover'd them as a garment*: And this made them *speak of wicked Blasphemies, and set their talk against the most high*, Psal. 73. 8, 9. Yea, he himself felt something of this Tumour, for he said in his Prosperity, that he *should never be moved*: he began to cast off all dependance upon God, and to rely only on his own strength:

strength: And therefore we find *Agar* praying against Riches, lest *being full, he should deny God, and say, who is the Lord?* Prov. 30. 8, 9.

Again, Prosperity tempts many unto Wantonness and Luxury; Men's corrupt Natures too often turning the Encouragements to Virtue, into the incentives to Vice, and making their Plenty the fewel of their Lust and Vanity. By which means, their Riches serve only to inflame their reckoning, and their abused Gifts and Talents do but sink them the deeper into Eternal Misery: The sense of this rectified the Psalmist's mistake in this matter, and kept him from grieving or grudging at the short-liv'd Prosperity of the Wicked; for when *he went into the Sanctuary, he soon Understood the end of those Men; how they were sate in slippery places, from whence they were suddenly cast down, and came to a fearful end; from whence he learn't rather to pity, than envy that Prosperity, which had so fatal an issue, and serv'd merely to fatten them for the slaughter.* As you may Read at large in the 73 Psalm.

But is Adversity the cure of these Evils; and do Afflictions best tend to prevent the danger of them? Yes; for these help to keep Men humble, sensible of their weak-

ness and dependance upon a superior Power, and make them look up to him, from whom both Trouble and Deliverance come: Indeed Afflictions naturally lead Men to consider; he that feels the smart of the Rod, will naturally look to him that strikes, and consider too the Reason of his inflicting it; and since Afflictions spring not out of the Dust, they direct our Contemplations higher, and shew us the Divine Hand that sends them, by which means we are brought to *hear the voice of the Rod, and of him that appointed it: In their Afflictions* (saith God) *they will seek me early*; the Mariners in a Storm call each upon their God, whose Being and Providence in a Calm they had utterly forgotten: *Before I was afflicted* (saith the Psalmist) *I went astray, but now I have learn't thy Statutes; and therefore thankfully acknowledg'd, that God of very faithfulness had caused him to be troubled*: Adversity and trouble have reduc'd many, that were miss-led and corrupted by Prosperity: Riches (saith the Philosopher) are not to be reputed good things, therefore the worst as well as the best have them; neither are Afflictions to be reckon'd evil things, therefore the best as well as the worst undergo them.

These

These things are not only agreeable to, but discoverable likewise by the Light of Reason, to which if we add the greater Light of Revelation in this matter, you will see greater cause to dread, than desire Prosperity, and that we should be so far from being afraid, or asham'd, that we ought rather to *glory in Tribulations*. In a Word,

If we rightly consider the many and great dangers of Prosperity, and compare them with the many and vast advantages of Affliction, we may soon see this stumbling-block of the Atheist to vanish, and that the Prosperity of bad, and Afflictions of good Men, are so far from an Argument against the Being and Providence of God, that they are a very strong Evidence and Confirmation of Both. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

G 3

L E T-

---

## LETTER XI.

S I R,

**H**AVING in my last remov'd that ancient stumbling-block of Atheism, taken from the Adversities of Good, and the Prosperity of bad Men. I proceed now to a later

Device of the Atheist, which is, his taking advantage from the many Sects and Differences in Religion, to lay aside all; and from Mens Disagreement about the way and manner of worshipping God, to settle in a total neglect and contempt of him: This is too obvious in experience, to need any proof; for may we not daily see the sense of Religion to wear off from the Minds of Men, by the stir that is made about it? Are not the impressions of Virtue and Goodness mightily defac'd by our Divisions? So that it cannot be doubted, but the different Sects and Opinions of our Age are a great Cause of that Atheism and Irreligion that so much abound in it: 'Tis too well known, that  
some

some Persons who have been well enough affected to Religion, and had no small zeal for, and satisfaction in it, have yet by falling into the ways of Separation contracted that giddiness and instability, as to lose all; and by running from one Sect to another, have run themselves out of breath, and made their last resort into Atheism; and others perceiving their clashing and inconstancy, have gone the same way, and thrown up all.

But what influence have Differences and Divisions in Religion upon the producing of Atheism? Why great, sundry ways: As, First, Divisions tend to expose Religion, and render it vile and despicable; for when Men behold it to set one another by the Ears, and to engage them in endless quarrels and disputes, they come to despise and think meanly of it; and so are easily induc'd to abandon that which breeds so much discord and animosity: They are apt to think, that Religion (if there were any such thing) would be a more peaceable, quiet, and harmless thing, and have other Effects upon the Minds of Men; but finding it to create little else than feuds and differences among the Professors of it, they come to entertain low and contemptible thoughts of it; and being made only a Bone of Contention, think it good

for nothing but to be thrown away. Again,

2dly. Divisions beget those doubts and uncertainties about Religion, that unsettle Mens minds, and bring them into such a Maze, that they know not where to fix: And in this tumult and confusion of thoughts, many are tempted to throw up all, rather than wander about in such uncertainties, and lose themselves in a crowd of endless and disputable Opinions. Moreover,

3dly. Among the numerous Sects and Parties that are in Religion, there can be but one in the Right; for tho' error be Infinite, yet Truth is but one; and where to find this among a numberless Sett of Pretenders, is they think a matter of so much labour and difficulty, that they chuse rather to let all alone, than to be at the pains and trouble of such an Enquiry. Beside,

4thly. Some persons having discover'd the folly and falshood of some darling Opinions they formerly admir'd, are thereby induc'd to suspect all the rest: And others having found out the Cheat and Imposture of many more, are apt to conclude the rest to be no better: All which have an easie and natural tendency towards Atheism,

theism, and are made use of by many to that end.

Yea all that are indifferent in matters of Religion, and, with *Gallio*, care for none of these things (of which the World affords but too many) all such I say will be glad to have so plausible a pretence and excuse for their Irreligion; and they whose interest and design it is to have no Religion, will be sure to lay hold of this and all other advantages against it. In a word, Divisions naturally destroy that Love and Charity which is the *Bond of perfectness*, and the life of all true Religion, and likewise necessarily beget that Hatred, Strife, and Animosity, that is the ground-work of Atheism, Confusion, and every Evil work.

Now here it may not be amiss to stay a while, and consider the great Evil and Danger of our unhappy Dissentions; what unspeakable mischief they do in the World, and particularly what an apparent handle they give to Atheism, being too great an occasion for it, and putting too fair a colour upon it. For by raising these disputes, they do but raise a mist before the Eyes of the People, whereby many are wrong-tided and led into Atheism, and hardened in their disbelief and contempt of all Religion; and there fore 'twas a wise and whole-  
some

some piece of Advice of the Apostle, to *mark those that cause Divisions and avoid them.*

Neither will it be amiss, if the Authors and Abettors of these Divisions will set down and consider, what account they will be able to give, for those many and great Evils, that apparently proceed from them: For if we are forbidden to lay any stumbling-Block or occasion of falling in our Brother's way, how will these Men answer for all that Irreligion that hath been evidently occasioned by this means? Or what Plea will they make for all that Schism and Atheism, into which so many are hereby betray'd? This is a Consideration of greater Moment than some are aware of; for tho' offences may *and will come, yet woe be to them by whom the offence cometh.*

But are these Differences and Divisions in Religion a sufficient pretence and excuse for Atheism? No, far from it; for tho' such are accountable to God, that give the occasion; yet that will not justify or excuse those that take it; this being an Evil which they are sufficiently forewarn'd of, and therefore should be forewarn'd against it: So that all the Atheism occasion'd from hence, proceeds rather from an Obstinacy and Perverseness in the Will, than from  
any

any defect of Light or Knowledge in the Understanding.

And here we find the Atheists, who would be thought Men of the deepest reach and insight into these things, guilty of very foul and false Reasoning in this matter: For,

First, What tho' some Opinions in Religion have been found to be false, will it follow thence, that there is none true? There are some that have entertain'd wrong Notions in all Arts and Sciences, yea have maintain'd false Problems even in the Mathematicks themselves; and will any conclude from thence, that they are all lies and falsities? This Principle would destroy all knowledge; and lead Men to deny and disbelieve every thing: There have been no doubt Hereticks and Schismatics in all Ages, who have espous'd many Errors and mistaken Opinions about the Worship of God; and will any infer from thence, that all Religion is imposture? Certainly this is very bad arguing, and will lead Men to the heighth of Scepticism and Infidelity. Again,

What tho' Men differ about some things, will it follow thence that they agree in nothing? And if (as one hath well observ'd) their disagreement be an Argument of the falshood of some things; why

is

is not their Agreement as good an Argument for the truth of other ? The differences in Religion are commonly about the Circumstances of it, as about the Modes of Worship and Discipline ; whereas Men generally agree in the Matters of Faith and Essentials of Religion ; and indeed there is nothing wherein all Mankind do more universally agree, than in the Belief and Worship of a God : And is it not unreasonable, because they may differ in some things, to suspect the Truth of that wherein they are all agreed ? He that finds himself inclin'd to make this bad use of Mens disputes, and to improve these petty differences into Atheism, may do well to sit down and consider how far Religion is concern'd in them, which if he can be perswaded to do, he will soon see that these things do not affect the Truth and Foundation of it, in which they are all agreed, but only the beauty and ornament of the Superstructure, they refer rather to matters of Speculation than Practice : And if any have various Sentiments about the Ornaments and Out-works of a Building, sure that can be no Reason either to distrust or subvert the Foundation. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

L E T.

---



---

## LETTER XII.

S I R,

**I** Shew'd in my last, the perverse use which the Atheist makes of the Disputes and Differences that are found in the World about matters of Religion: I proceed in this to Another Device much like it; which is, his taking occasion from the Hypocrisie and bad lives of some pretenders to it, to conclude all Religion to be false, and from thence to fall into Atheism and Infidelity.

This is a frequent and fatal practice, of which our Age does afford many sad and doleful instances: there are some who will be at no pains to examine the truth or falshood of any Religion, but take it upon trust, as the Custom of the Country where they live, or as 'tis deriv'd down to them by their Parents or Ancestors: Now these lie open to all the assaults of Atheism, and being altogether unguarded against them, are but too ready to surrender upon any summons, and to yield to every temptation to it: Their Faith, for lack of being Catechiz'd and well-principl'd in the beginning,

ginning, hath no firm bottom, but lies wholly in the power of a corrupt and inconstant Will, which will move as interest and inclination lead it, so that as soon as they become wicked enough, to need Atheism for a Refuge, they will be ready to flie to it: And therefore we are bid to try and examine the Truth of Doctrines, and be ready to give a Reason of the Faith and Hope that is in us, when ever we are ask'd or call'd to it, that being well-grounded in the Truth of Religion, we may adhere to it against all opposition, and stand the shock of the fiercest Temptations. Again,

There are others, who think sometimes upon Religion, and make some enquiry into it, but yet judge of the truth or falshood of it, not by the soundness of its Precepts, but by the Lives and Practices of those that make the greatest profession of it: These likewise to save the trouble of a deep and impartial search into the grounds and principles upon which Religion stands, enquire what others think of it, who by their pretences seem best to understand it; and because Mens Actions are the best discovery of their thoughts and opinions of things; they judge of what they think in these matters, by what they see them do; so that when they see such

Mens

Mens Practices give the Lye to their Profession, and find them act as as if they did not believe what they say, this makes them think that there is no Reason to believe it, and that Religion is nothing else but a cunning Device, made use of by some Men to carry on their worldly Interest and Designs. This no doubt hath drawn many into Atheism, and harden'd others in it. The many vile tricks that have been play'd under the Mask of Religion, the gilding of Treason and Rebellion with a specious pretence of Zeal for God's Glory, and hiding Faction and Sedition under the colours of Reformation, have made many suspect the whole for a Contrivance, and to cast it off as a System of Lies and Impostures.

But is it a true and safe Rule, to judge of the truth of Religion by the lives of those that profess it? No, a very unsafe and crooked one: For,

Though the Hypocrite that plays this game, shall dearly rue hereafter for all the Evil done by this means; tho' his portion of misery and damnation will be heavier and hotter than others, for laying such a stumbling block in their way, by which so many fall to their Eternal Ruin; yet this will not excuse the folly of such as suffer themselves to be mis-led and betra'y'd  
by

by it, nor justifie such Atheistical Conclusions drawn from it: Example you know is a false and fallacious Rule to walk by; for since the generality of Men leave the way in which they should walk, to follow them, or infer our Duty from them, is for the most to go astray.

But they draw this Conclusion (they say) not from the loose and debauch'd part of the World, that have no sense of Religion, but from the stricter sort, that make the highest pretensions to it, and seem to have the deepest impressions of it; and if these make it evident by their lives, that they believe little or nothing of it, what can we think of it, but as a mere Delusion? But do not Men act sometimes against their own persuasion? And are not too many carried away by the sway of their Lusts and corrupt Designs, against the convictions of their own Mind? That Men sometimes knowingly and wilfully commit great sins, and cover vile enormities under a cloak of greater sanctity, is a matter indeed to be lamented, but cannot reasonably be urg'd as an Argument against Religion: Will any think that a Cheat, because some that do ill things are found to be so? And if these act so bad a part, shall any be encourag'd by it to act a worse? Sure this is very bad arguing, and  
such

beh as cannot well be own'd by any, that would be thought Men of Sense and Reason.

'Tis not unusual for Mens words to be better than their Actions; and in such cases the wisest course is to do as they say, and not as they do. This direction we find given with Relation to the Pharisees, who sat in *Moses's* Chair, and spake many good things from it, tho' their doings ran counter to their Doctrines; *what therefore they say, we are bid to do, but not to do after their works, for they say and do not.* Certainly, 'tis a much better course to learn from others bad lives to amend our own, than to take occasion from thence to grow worse, and to cast off all fear of God from before our Eyes.

Beside, have not some Men bad designs to carry on? And do they stick at any ways or means to promote them? May not the best things be abus'd to evil purposes? And is nothing true or good, because it may be made to serve bad ends?

Now tho' these false tricks of Hypocrites, may be a good Reason why we should not believe every Spirit, or be carried away by vain pretences; yet they can be no Argument against the Truth of Religion, no more than it would be to affirm, that there are no true Diamonds, because

H

there

there are so many counterfeits. How then comes it to pass, that so many are caught in this snare, and mis-led by such an apparent fallacy? Why, this must proceed partly

From some Mens averfness to Religion, heighten'd by a strong desire to follow the swinge of their corrupt inclinations, and to be freed from any check or restraint it might lay upon them. And,

Partly likewise, from their too great proneness to Atheism, which makes them lay hold on any thing, tho' never so mean, that may give any countenance or encouragement to it.

In short then, The Atheists great aptness to draw such bad Conclusions from Lives may be a good Caution against all Immorality and Vice, by which the name of God is Blasphem'd; but can by no means be made a Plea for Atheism, or give any just Cause to discard Religion as an Imposture. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

L E T.

## L E T T E R XIII.

S I R,

**H**AVING in the foregoing Letters shew'd the weakness of the Atheists Arguments against a Deity: I proceed in this to another Artifice he makes use of to undermine the Belief and Worship of him; and that is to Scoff at and Deride Religion, and if he cannot Argue it, to endeavour to Laugh it out of the World. This is done by those, who would be thought to be the knowing Men and Wits of the Age; who first try the strength of their Reason, and when that fails, fly to Art to support their Atheism, and set their Wits at work to Rally and Ridicule Religion.

This is a degree of wickedness, which Men are not wont to arrive to presently, for the Psalmist intimates, that they must *walk a while in the Counsel of the Ungodly, and stand in the way of Sinners, before they can set down and settle in the Chair of the Scornor.*

Psal. 1. 1. When they are seated there, and accustomed themselves to this vile practice, they soon lose the sense of a Deity, and so perswade themselves and others

H 2 that

that there is no God, because they have the impudence to scorn and despise him.

But do these Men think by Laughter to alter the Nature of Good and Evil? Or that a God of Infinite Power, Wisdom and Justice, will be thus play'd or droll'd out of his Being? Can they hope to prevail by leveling their Blasphemies against the most High; *setting their Mouth against the Heavens, and causing their Tongue to walk through the Earth?* No, certainly; this is both a fruitless and frivolous attempt, for *he that sitteth in the Heavens will laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision.*

What end then can these Men propose in such a vile piece of Wickedness? Why, this is done,

First, to gain to themselves the Reputation of being Wits; which they endeavour to do, by exposing the most serious things: The life and picquancy of Wit, (as one hath well observ'd) lies in the surprizingness of its conceits and expressions; and consequently to Ridicule things Sacred, which ought in Reason to be Priviledg'd from it, is most apt to astonish and surprize the hearers; and if any (as light and vain Persons are wont to be) are thereby moved to Laughter, they are tickled with the conceit

conceit, and thereby please and inure themselves to this impious practice.

This way the dullest persons (if they will be Prophane enough) may be easily dubb'd Wits, by venturing to say those rude things of God and Religion, which no wise Man would presume to utter, and this proves a strong temptation to many who have no other way to be thought witty. Again,

2dly. This is thought by some a genteel and brave thing, to go out of the common Road, and to cast off those fears which others are aw'd and terrifi'd withal; they reckon it a sort of Gallantry of Spirit, to be above the frights that possess Vulgar Minds, and to shake off those Fetters of Religion, with which the generality suffer themselves tamely to be bound; and the better to break these Chains, they labour to break their Jest upon them. Moreover,

3dly. This is done to give the better countenance to their sinful practices and immoralities; for if they can expose Virtue, and make Religion ridiculous, they may act their Vices with the greater grace, and follow the sway of their Lusts without shame or controul. Beside, they think it a good Plea for their Wickedness, that they do not therein contradict any Principle they profess, they act suitably to what

H 3

they

they pretend, and therefore to put the better Face upon their Vices, they laugh at those for Fools, who do not believe and act as they do: Thus by accustoming themselves to ridicule the most serious things, they bring on a Contempt of God and Religion, and droll themselves into Atheism. But is there any Wisdom or Safety in so doing? No, quite otherwise; nothing can be more sottish or dangerous; for all such Mirth is no better than Madness, and this kind of Laughter will shortly end in *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.*

We have heard of some, that would rather lose their Friend than their Jest; but 'tis strange that this drolling humour should carry any so far, as to make them venture the loss of the favour of God, the best Friend and Benefactor in the World, for the sake of an idle prophane Jest, which taints the Air that gives it breath, and either grates upon, or corrupts the Ears of those that hear it.

But because this is become a too frequent and fashionable practice, and hath betray'd many into Atheism; 'twill be requisite to lay open the folly and danger of it. And, First, if there were nothing else, the unpardonable rudeness and indecency of this practice, is sufficient to shew it highly unbecoming

becoming any person of Sense or Breeding; for since Mankind generally profess a high esteem and veneration for God and Religion, it must be a manifest breach of Civility and good Manners to scoff at and deride them: The Laws of Conversation require to treat all Men with due respect; there is none can hear with patience his Father or his Friend expos'd to Scorn and Derision; and what an unparallel'd affront must it be to Mankind, to make God and Religion (the dearest things to them in the world) the subject of Contempt and Raillery?

Again, 2<sup>dly</sup>. The mighty influence which the belief of a God hath upon the publick welfare, may convince any considering Man of the great Evil of deriding it; he that despises Religion, cuts the Sinews of Government, and dissolves the firmest Bond of Human Society; for when Men have laugh'd away the Fear of God and the Sense of Religion, all Obligations of Conscience are gone with it, and nothing remains to keep them to their duty, but the fear of Men, which is a loose Principle that will vary or cease, as opportunity, interest, or humour lead it. Moreover,

3<sup>dly</sup>. To jest at, and expose Religion, is the grossest abuse of Wit that can be made of it; for it turns one of the chiefest Ornaments of Virtue, into an Encouragement

of Vice, and makes that which was given to recreate the Mind, and sweeten Conversation, to become the Bane and Pest of both: Wit (as a great Man hath observ'd) is a keen Weapon, as apt for bad as good purposes, and therefore a wise Man should have the keeping of it, to prevent the mischief and danger of its ill management.

There is a good use of Wit in many Cases; as to adorn Virtue, and recommend it to the best Advantage; to expose Vice, and render it as it deserves, Ridiculous; to season Conversation, and to ease and relieve the Mind under the burden of its Cares; and whilst it keeps within these Bounds, 'tis a useful and commendable Quality; but when it transgresses these Rules, and breaks in upon God and Religion, it loseth its name, and degenerates into Insolence and Impiety.

Yea, such as would be thought Wits, by jesting upon sacred and serious things, do but betray the greatest folly; 'twas the fool that said in his Heart, there was no God; and Solomon tells us, that none but *Fools make a mock of Sin*, or think of *mocking God, who neither can nor will be mocked*. In a word, all prophane Wit is the height of folly, and tho' it have never so much Salt, cannot be savoury, but nauseous and offensive to all wise Men.

*Lastly,*

*Lastly*, The unspeakable hazard the Atheist runs in deriding Religion, is enough to shew the danger and folly of this impious practice : For if the Atheist shall find at last that there is a God, as undoubtedly he will, what will he say for those rude scoffs and affronts he hath put upon him ? What account can he give for all this impudent Buffoonry ? What horror and confusion of Face must needs seize them, when the Maker and Judge of the World shall avenge this insolence upon them, and vindicate his Honour in their Eternal Destruction ? This is a matter well worth their serious and timely consideration, that they may repent and return no more to this Folly : Otherwise, if they will continue to laugh on, and scoff at Religion, God Almighty will shortly take his turn too, and will *laugh at their Calamity, and mock when their Fear cometh.*

In short then, this drolling upon Sacred Things is so far from giving any just encouragement to Atheism, that 'tis an high Aggravation of the Impiety ; and all such Mirth will end at last in the deepest Sadness. I am,

S I R,

Yours,

A. B.

L E T.

## LETTER XIV.

S I R,

**I** Proceed now to the last, tho' none of the least Artifices to support and countenance Atheism: For when the Atheist is beaten out of all the former subterfuges, he hath recourse to another Device, suggested to him by his sensual Lusts and Appetite. And that is,

To charge Religion with a foolish Bargain; and that such as embrace it, act upon slender and insufficient Motives. To prove which, they tell us,

That to part with present Certainties, for uncertain Futurities, can be no Act of Wisdom; for in doubtful Cases the greatest Evidence should sway: Now we are sure (say they) of what is present, but can never be so of what is future; and therefore he charges it with folly, to deny themselves the present Pleasures, Profits, and Honours of this World, for a few vain Hopes of better things in another, which perhaps may never come to pass, and of which none could ever yet give them any certain Evidence.

This

This, tho' own'd indeed by few, is yet the Sense and Language of most mens Lives and Actions; which shew them to be fond to excess of these Earthly enjoyments, but to have little or no regard to the weightier Concerns of Heaven and Eternity, and, with Martha, *to be cumber'd about many things*, with the neglect of the *one thing necessary*. The Epicures Song is, *let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die*; the present time is ours, and all that we can call so; for the time to come, we know not whose it may be, and therefore 'tis wisdom to enjoy what we are sure of, and not to defer or suspend our happiness upon any such future uncertainties.

But *be not deceiv'd* (saith the Apostle) *Evil Communications corrupt good Manners*; yea such vain communication corrupt mens Minds, debauch their Reason, and makes them act like Fools, when they would be thought to talk most wisely. For,

First, The present Enjoyments of this World, (how confidently soever we may call them our own) are infinitely vain and uncertain, and when we think to enjoy most of them, frequently leave and lurch our expectations: *Riches take to themselves wings and fly away*, when we think to hold them fastest: The Pleasures and Delights of the

the World are all fleeting and momentary, yea they are imbitter'd with a Sting, and mingled with Sorrow : Honour is a puff of wind that is quickly gone, and he that admires these things, sets his heart upon *that which is not* : So that the Atheist is mistaken in his Supposition, for these present things are not so certain as he takes them. Neither are they so much the Happiness, as the Trouble and Misery of human life : the wicked Man knows many times that he plays the Fool in gratifying his Lusts, and owns that he ought to do otherwise ; he feels a regret and trouble upon his mind, and does not so much enjoy, as disquiet himself in indulging of them. However,

The Atheist here tells us, that the pleasures of this life affect his Senses, he feels himself in some measure pleas'd and delighted with them ; and why should he abridge himself of such sensible Delights, for Future Things, of which he hath no taste, and can have no assurance ?

As for the pleasures of Sense, they are in the most innocent use of them vastly exceeded by the pleasures of Virtue and Religion ; for these have a sweeter Relish on the Mind, and leave far more lasting impressions of joy and satisfaction, than any sensual Delights ever did or can do : And if  
this

this pure delight flow at last *into fulness of joy, and run into those Rivers of pleasure, that are at Gods right hand for evermore*, there is infinite Reason why we should abridge our selves in these sensual Enjoyments, for the fruition of a far more glorious and durable Felicity.

But still the uncertainty and want of Evidence for these things sticks with the Atheist, and makes the parting with the one for the other a foolish Bargain; for we never saw (saith he) nor experienc'd these things our selves, nor ever spake with any one that did.

But what kind of Evidence is it, that he would have of these things? I hope he does not expect more than the nature of the thing will bear, for that would be unreasonable, and shew him to be both unwilling and incapable of Conviction. Now God being a spiritual and consequently an invisible Substance, cannot be prov'd by the Evidence of Sense, for *no man hath seen God at any time.*

Neither can a future state, which commences not till after this life, be at present visible, or fall under the tryal or experience of any of our Senses: so that this kind of proof cannot in Reason be requir'd in this Case, neither can the Atheist exact it without wounding his own Cause; for neither

ther can *Epicurus's* Atoms, nor *Aristotle's* Eternity of the World be prov'd this way:

What Assurance then have we of these Truths? Why, we have the proper, that is a Moral Assurance, grounded upon the evident and necessary deductions of Reason, which is sufficient to beget a confident Perswasion of the truth of them, and to remove all doubts and distrust to the contrary.

In short, we have as great an Assurance of these Things, as 'tis possible for us to have, supposing that they are true, which is enough to satisfy any reasonable man in the belief of them: Let us suppose then that there is a God, that is a Being of all possible Perfections; how may we come to know or be assured of it? Why, not by the Evidence of Sense; for being a Spirit, he cannot fall under the Cognizance of any of our Senses; the only proof we can have of him, must be either from some secret impressions of him upon our Mind, or from some visible Effects and Operations, that can only be ascrib'd to such a Being; and both these we have in this Case. Again,

Supposing there be a future state for the Rewarding of Good, and Punishing of Bad Men, what proof can we have of it? Why, none from the evidence of Sense; for things future and at a distance are incapable of that kind of proof; all the Assurance we can have of it, is from the Attributes  
and

and Perfections of the first Cause and Maker of all things, whose Truth and Faithfulness hath declar'd it, and whose Mercy and Justice necessarily require it; for since the Observation and Violation of his Laws, are not usually rewarded or Punished in this life, there must be another state where the honour of those Divine Perfections will be more openly and thoroughly vindicated.

The truth is, 'tis not want of Light, but mens shutting their Eyes against it, that mis-lead's them in this matter; 'tis a false heart that suggests these doubts, and a corrupt Will that pretends lack of sufficient assurance: For Men dayly act upon far less Evidence in all other matters, and venture their Lives and Fortunes upon things that have no higher than this Moral Certainty; what wise Man ever doubts, whether there be such a place as the *Indies*, *Spain*, or *Turkey*, tho' perhaps he never saw either? Do not many transfer their Estates by way of Traffick into Foreign Countries, of which they have no other knowledge, than from the Testimony and Relation of others? And he that should refuse to believe or act upon this kind of Certainty, would be reckon'd no better than a Fool or a Mad-man: And if this sort of assurance be sufficient to justify our discretion

tion in the affairs of our Body ; why should we distrust it in the matters of our Soul ; especially since 'tis not possible in our present state to have any higher ?

But tho' this Evidence (saith the Atheist) be sufficient in Temporal Matters ; yet a greater Certainty is requisite in Divine Things, and the weightier Affairs of Eternity. Now tho' this be not wanting to all that are willing to receive it, yet what Reason can be given, why that Assurance which guides Men in the pursuit of a Lesser Good, should not influence them much more to obtain a Greater ; And that Evidence which is sufficient to prompt them to avoid Temporal Evils, should not more strongly encline them to escape those that are Eternal.

In a Word, The vast odds that is on the side of Religion, shews it to be far from a foolish Bargain ; for if there be no God or a World to come, the Good Man can be no loser, for he only parts with his Lusts, which are the shame and scandal of his Nature, and instead of following them, is directed to do what is most for his health, interest, reputation, and every way most conducing to the Peace and Comfort of the present life : But if there be a God and a future state, as 'tis more than ten thousand to one there are, he will be vastly

vastly a Gainer, for beside the present quiet and satisfaction he enjoys here, he is secur'd of everlasting Peace and Tranquillity hereafter, and for the poor perishing trifles of Time, which he now parts with, shall be rewarded with the ineffable Joys and Glories of Eternity; and sure no wise Man will charge this with Folly: For if he who hath exchang'd Pebbles for Pearls, is by all thought to have made a wise bargain, he that parts with the light *Momentary things* of this Life, for an *Eternal Crown of Glory* in a better, will in the end be found to have made a much wiser. I am,

SIR,

Yours,

A. B.

## LETTER XV.

SIR,

I Have in the foregoing Letters, according to promise, set forth some of the principal Arts and Devices, that are made use of to support and countenance Atheism; and likewise, according to your desire, laid open the Evil and Danger of them. But because the Request of your Letter extended not only to the Cause, but the Cure of Atheism; it will be requisite, for a Close, to subjoyn some few Directions to

I

that

that end. And here what hath been said touching the Rise of this Evil, may help us to find out the Remedies of it; for as to know the Cause of a Distemper, is a fair step towards the Cure, so to discover the Devices of Atheism, is the readiest way to prevent the Danger, and to be preserv'd from the Contagion of it.

But because the Rise of this Evil is more from the Will and Affections, than from the Mind or Understanding, we are to apply our selves rather to rectifie the former, than to inform the latter; for Men are not Atheists so much for want of Knowledge, as for lack of a due Use and Application of it. And therefore the

First and Grand Preservative against Atheism, must be to mortifie and subdue all sinful and sensual Lusts, for these give the strongest byass to this Evil, and draw too many into it: We observ'd before, that a vicious life makes it Mens interest that there be no God, and that makes it their wish, and soon after their belief that there is none: This is the common and ordinary Road to Atheism, and is indeed that *broad way, that leadeth to Destruction*; which being so easie, and suitable to Mens vile and vicious Inclinations, many there be that find and walk in it.

But that we may not lose our selves, and

walk on for Company to our own ruin, we are to get out of this broad way, and betake our selves into the straighter paths of Mortification and Self-denial, which lying cross to Mens wicked and corrupt affections, is the true Reason that few there be that find it. 'Twas wisely observ'd by a great Man, that the main Reason why any Man becomes an Atheist, is because he is a wicked Man, and resolves to be so: Religion would curb them in their Lusts, and therefore they cast it off, and put all the Scorn they can upon it: So that to cure this Malady, we must, in the Prophets Phrase, *cease to do evil, and learn to do well*: This will take off that wrong byass that turns so many out of the way, and likewise set them right in the way that *leads to everlasting life*.

*Secondly*, To prevent this growing Evil, let us often meditate upon the admirable Frame and Fabrick of the World, and set apart some time for the Contemplation of the wonderful Works both of Creation and Providence; these will afford such plain Evidence and Demonstration of a Deity, that 'tis scarce possible for the most profligate Person; that will consider, to overlook them. I have already shew'd you the vain Attempts of the Atheist, in going about to solve the *Phænomena* of the World without a Supreme Being, either

by affirming that it had no beginning, or that it had its beginning from Chance, or Fortune, both which are attended with such Absurdities, as are too gross for any, but an Atheists Faith to swallow; for which way soever we turn our selves, we meet with the plain Prints and Footsteps of a Deity.

If we look upward, the *Heavens declare the glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy Works*; those glorious Luminaries of Heaven, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, which by their constant Influences cherish and enlighten the World, mind us of that great Father of Lights, that plac'd them there; the exquisite Order, Beauty, and steady Revolution of those Heavenly Bodies, which come forth *like a Bridegroom out of their Chambers, and rejoyce as a Giant to run their Course*, are so many daily and Ocular Demonstrations of a Supream Being, that first set, and still continues them in motion.

If we look down upon the Earth, and behold the admirable Frame, Order, and Contrivance of all things in it, we may plainly see that of the Apostle verified, that *God hath not left himself without witness*; every Creature bearing their Testimony, and directing our Contemplation to him.

If we take a view of our selves, and behold the curious Needle-work and Con-  
texture

texture of our Bodies, we may see there the Finger of a God ; and with the Psalmist break out in admiration of the infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of our Creator ; to which, if we add the consideration of the wonderful Frame and Faculties of the Soul, we may see the Image and Supercription of our Maker so visibly stamp'd on it, that any considering Man may know whose it is, and whence it came.

If we go lower, to the Creatures subject-ed to Man's Dominion, we shall find the Birds of the Air singing forth the Praises of their Maker, the Fish of the Sea declaring the Wonders of the Deep ; and all the Beasts of the Field, so many Heralds and Instruments of his Honour. Yea, if we descend to the lowest rank of Creatures, and behold the Herbs, the Grass, and the Flowers of the Field, we shall find Divinity almost visibly Imprinted there ; the Beauties of the Rose and the Lilly, which without any toyl or spinning are array'd in that natural gayety and bravery, that exceeds all the costly Attire of *Solomon*, are plain Instances of the Wisdom and Care of a Heavenly Father, who thus *cloaths the grass of the field*, and provides so wonderfully for all his Creatures.

These are noble Subjects for our Meditation ; in which we are admirably assisted

by a late Learned Discourse (of Dr. *Pelling*) concerning the Existence of God, wherein the ingenious Author hath so excellently display'd the abstruse Mysteries of Nature, and the Wonders both of Creation and Providence, as is sufficient for ever to silence and baffle all the Attempts of Atheism: And therefore I shall add no more on this pleasant Subject, but refer you to it.

*Thirdly*, To prevent this Evil of Atheism, let us hearken to the voice of Conscience speaking within us, and beware of stifling the notices or good motions of it: If we turn our Eyes inward, and consult our own breasts, we shall find something there that secretly tells us when we do well, and when we act amiss; when we do that which is meet, right, and our bounden Duty, we find a calm and serenity upon our Mind, that cheers it with unexpressible delight and satisfaction: When we do what we ought not, we find something within that doth reprehend and fly upon us, yea, and gaul us too with remorse and anguish; insomuch that there is none, how wicked soever, but finds sometimes a Reluctance in his Spirit against bad Actions, even when his corrupt Passions, Designs, and Inclinations draw him most strongly to them.

Now this proceeds from the secret calls  
and

and whispers of Conscience, which is a kind of Deputy set up in every Man's breast, to preserve the Memory and Fear of a Deity : And therefore, we are to take heed how we despise the Calls and Admonitions hereof, for this will lead to a fear'd Conscience, and that to Atheism.

*Fourthly*, To avoid this Evil, we must (as much as possible) avoid all Atheistical Discourse and Company, for these are too apt to infuse bad principles into mens minds, and to instil even the poison of Atheism : Custom you know and Company have a mighty influence upon Mankind, and always leave either good or bad impressions behind them : if we converse with wise men, *Solomon* tells us, we shall learn Wisdom ; we shall be benefitted by their Discourse and Example, and as one Coal kindles another, so we may receive heat and warmth from their Piety and Devotion : but if we delight in the Conversation of loose and vain Persons, we shall learn their practices, and insensibly lose the very Principles of Religion ; corrupt Communication naturally tends to corrupt good manners ; frequent swearing and cursing take off from the Reverence that is due to the Divine Majesty, and the lewd Talk and Example of bad company gradually wear off all impressions of Virtue : Vice is infectious, and communi-

cates its venom and malignity to such as come near it, and therefore we are to keep at a distance from it, and to have *no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* 4

*Fifthly*, To be arm'd against Atheism, we must labour to be well grounded in the Principles of Religion, and not to take up our Faith upon Trust without Examination. A Tree (you know) that is not well rooted, is liable to be shak'd with every wind; and such as are not well-grounded in their Religion, are easily tols'd to and fro, and carried about with every wind of Doctrine; He that for want of instruction is unable to give a Reason of the Faith that is in him, will be as unable upon any assault to give any Reason why he should keep it; and such as take up their faith only upon trust, will be as ready to lay it down again, when a strong temptation calls for it.

If you observe it, 'tis the uncatechiz'd and ill-instructed part of Mankind, that fall into irreligion, and are carried captive by infidelity; such as these, for want of being well season'd in time with pious and sound Principles, have nothing to hold them; so that as they grow up, if their Temper be Sanguine and Jolly, they fall into Lewdness and Debauchery; if more sour and melancholy they fall into Phanaticism and Divisions; and both, tho' going different ways,

ways, meet at last in the Center of Atheism : Again,

Mens shifting of Principles, for want of steadiness in Religion, and varying from sound and receiv'd Doctrines, is undoubtedly a great occasion of Atheism ; for when Men openly relinquish what they have publickly maintain'd, it makes many call in Question the Truth of Religion it self, and to think that all other parts of it have no better grounds than that which they have rejected as groundless ; and tho' it be unjust in any to take this offence, yet 'tis no less unsafe for any to give it. Wherefore,

*Sixthly*, To prevent this Evil, we must beware of being seduc'd or drawn into Sects or Parties, for this hath begotten that giddiness and instability, that hath shak'd the Faith of many, and unawares led them into Atheism.

Religion hath its Name from binding, and its chief Design is to keep Men firm to their Duty to God and Man ; now the relaxing of this Bond, lets Men loose in both, and that brings on Divisions in point of Worship, and Corruptions in point of Manners ; both which naturally lead to Irreligion and Atheism ; and therefore the Wisdom and Piety of a Nation is best seen in prescribing good Laws to prevent all looseness and extravagance in both : and as 'tis the Duty of Superiors to

Counte-

Countenance a well-establish'd Religion, by encouraging the Observers, and punishing the Transgressors of it; so is it the unquestionable Duty of Subjects to keep close to the Rules of it, without corrupting its Doctrine by Heresie, or breaking its Unity by Schisms and Divisions.

*Seventhly*, To put a stop to Atheism, we must take care to frequent the solemn Worship of God, and diligently observe the stated Seasons of publick and private Devotion; the neglect of this hath been an unhappy occasion of the growth of this impiety; for the many pressing Affairs of this World are apt to croud in upon our minds, to engross too much of our time and thoughts, and thereby to beget an utter forgetfulness of God, and the greater Concerns of another life; to prevent which, God Almighty, to keep up the Remembrance of himself for our own good, hath appointed some solemn Seasons, in which he hath requir'd us to rest from all our worldly Cares and Labours, that we may the better attend his Worship and Service. Now the observing of these Seasons will help to take off our Minds from an inordinate pursuit of this World, and fix them on a better, 'twill recollect our scatter'd Thoughts, and preserve a due Sense of Piety and Religion; the publick Instructions of those Seasons serve to awaken and stir

stir us up to our Duty, and our Zeal is increased by the concurrence and example of each others Devotion ; by which means the Sense and Fear of God is still kept alive in our Minds.

Whereas by a careless neglect of Publick Worship, God is in a manner excluded out of all our Thoughts, we become wholly immers'd in the Cares and Pleasures of this Life, and so naturally sink into Atheism and Impiety, So that to continue sound and serious in Religion, we must carefully frequent the Publick Worship, and be mindful likewise of the Seasons of private and secret Devotion, for these will withdraw our Minds from sensible Objects, which are too apt to enslave us, and lead to the Contemplation of Divine and Heavenly things, by which alone the Sense of God and Religion can be preserv'd.

*Eighthly,* To this we must add the Exercises of a Holy Life, without which the sense of Religion will insensibly wear off and decay: A Profession of Piety without Practice, is like a Tree without Fruit, which commonly dies away, or else is cut down and cast into the Fire ; to make a fair shew of Religion, without a suitable Conversation, is but to deny God with the greater Solemnity, and however such may seem to flatter him with their Lips, they

they Read a Lecture of Atheism in their Lives, and cause the Name of God to be blasphem'd. And therefore, that we may not deny God, we must *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present World.* These *fruits of righteousness will redound not only to the glory of God, but to the Credit of Religion, which is best kept alive both in our selves and in others by this means; the light of such good works will so shine before men, as to make them glorifie God in the day of visitation;* Examples are wont to have a greater force than Precepts; and most Men like Sheep are apt to go rather *quam*, than *quod*: And therefore great heed is to be taken to our ways, that we do not by bad Examples draw any from the Truth, or mis-lead them into the paths of Errour and Wickedness: And as this should be observ'd by all Men, so more especially by such as have any higher Station in Church or State, for these are like a *Chymney a Hill*, which lies open to the view of all, their actions are more visible and exemplary, and leave either a good or bad influence behind them, which should make them the more wary and circumspect, that they give no offence, or be unto any an occasion of falling: By this means we shall banish Atheism, and keep Religion in the World, and thereby at once adorn our Profession here, and secure

cure the Reward annex to it hereafter.

*Lastly*, To cure this Evil, let us often ponder upon the extream Folly and Danger of Atheism ; the frequent and serious Consideration whereof may help to fortifie our Minds against it, and incline us to hate and abhor so vile an Enormity.

Now the Atheist's Folly is seen in the badness of his arguing, and his Danger in the badness of his acting.

Of the former many instances have been given already ; to which I shall only add one more, to wit, That the Atheist, in going about to prove there is no God, attempts to prove a pure Negative, which all wise Men know to be not only absurd, but impossible, unless where the Being of a thing implies a Contradiction ; there indeed a Negative may be prov'd, for 'tis good Reasoning, that a thing is not, because it cannot be ; but where the Being of a thing is not impossible, as none ever yet pretended the Being of a God to be ; there, unless our Minds could grasp the Knowledge of all possibilities, and comprehend all things that are or may be, such Reasoning must be absurd and inconsequent ; for more things have an Existence in Nature, than in our Understanding, and many things are and may be which we know not of. Again,

The Notion of a God implying a Being that hath all possible Perfections, to deny such

such a Being is (as one hath well observ'd) to assert a possibility impossible, which is a flat contradiction. Moreover,

To deny that God is, is in effect to affirm it impossible that he should be; for Eternity being an Essential and inseparable Perfection of a Deity, he must have been for ever, or else he cannot be at all; so that if he be not now, he cannot begin to be; it being absurd to affirm of a Being that hath no beginning, that it may begin to be, which is another of the Atheist's Contradictions, and shews him guilty of bad Reasoning with a witness.

Neither is the Folly of his arguing more apparent, than the Danger of his acting: for he throws himself upon the greatest of all Hazards, upon the greatest of all Uncertainties, which is a matter never enough to be consider'd and lamented.

All that the Atheist builds upon, is, that 'tis somewhat a doubtful Case, whether there be a God or no, and that Men may do well enough without the Belief or Fear of him: But who but a Mad-man would run such a hazard, and stake down his immortal Soul on such a Peradventure? In all doubtful Cases, a thing may as well be as not be, and therefore matters are to be well weigh'd on both sides, especially if they are of Consequence and unalterable; in which Cases our Duty and Wisdom is to incline to that side, that hath the best

best Evidence, and the least Hazards.

Now for the Being of a God there are many weighty and pressing Arguments, and as much Evidence as can be if he were; against it, there is no proof pretended, nor is it indeed capable of any; And which way now ought a prudent Man to determine his assent?

If there be great Conveniences and no Danger on the one side, and if there be no Conveniences but vast Hazards on the other, 'tis easie to see on what side all wise Men ought to incline: If there be no such Being as a God, 'tis much for the Convenience of Mankind to believe and act as if there were, for hereby the publick Peace and Order of the World, together with every Man's private Benefit and Comfort are best preserv'd; and there can be no inconveniences in such a Belief, but the casting off a few sensual Lusts, which serve only to make the present life troublesome and uneasie; and after this life, supposing there be no other, the good Man will fare as well as any: But if there be a God and a future state after this, the Conveniences of Religion will infinitely preponderate, for they that believe and serve him will be eternally happy; and they that disbelieve or neglect him shall be eternally and irrecoverably miserable.

To conclude all, The Notion of a God being so evident, so weighty and so receiv'd

Let us make him the sole Object of our  
Love and the sole of the Christian's  
Trust and Alliance, let us make him the  
sole Object of our Praise and Prayer,  
let us remove Life and Breath and all  
our Thoughts and Affections aloft to  
him, let us make him the sole  
Object of our Love and Honor and  
Trust, let us in and above all things, whose  
infinite and adorable Perfections justly  
challenge these things from us.

Let us live in his Fear, and be  
wary of offending him either in Thought,  
Word, or Deed.

Let us make him the sole Object of our  
Trust and Alliance, reposing all our Confi-  
dence in him, and committing our selves  
to him in well-doing.

In a Word, Let us in all respects de-  
mean our selves towards him, as becometh  
Creatures to their Creator, paying him  
the constant Tribute of Religious Wor-  
ship that is due to him, and serving him  
truly all the days of our Life; so shall we  
have our Happiness here by these imper-  
fect Graces, which will be completed here-  
after in the Eternal Fruition and Adoration  
of him. Which is the hearty Wish and  
Prayer of,

**SIR,**

Your Faithful Friend and Servant,

**FINIS.**